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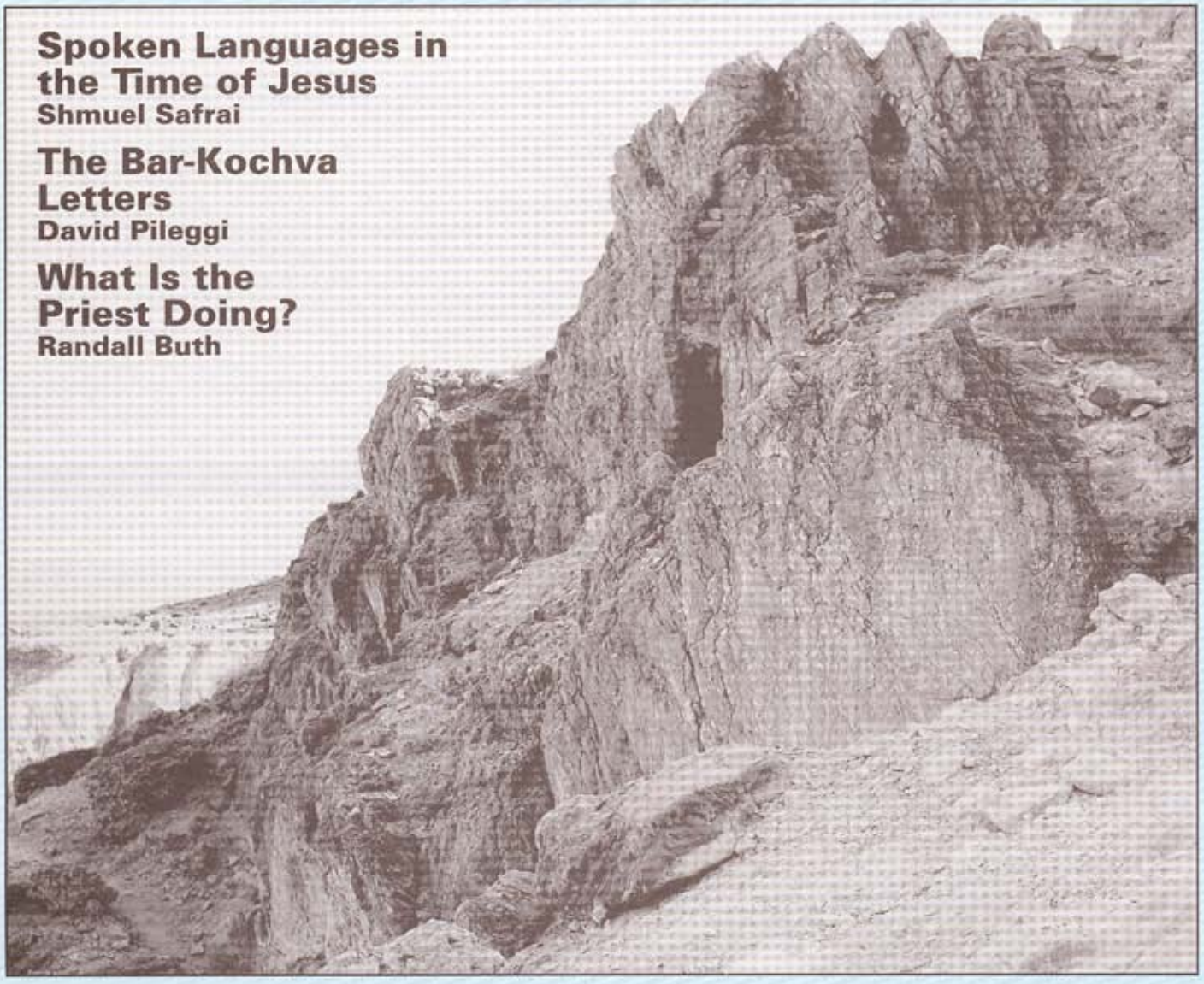

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A Bimonthly Report on Research into the Words of Jesus

Readers' Perspective

***Why do all** of JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE's writers use the Greek name Jesus instead of "Y'shua" or "Yeshua"? Is there a reason? Where did the name "Jesus" come from?*
– Maggie L. Lee, St. Louis, Missouri, U.S.A.

The spelling "Jesus" is used in JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE simply because that's the way the name is written in English. As we explained in "Hebrew Nuggets," Lessons 1–4 (Oct. 1987–Jan. 1988), "Jesus" is an English transliteration of a Greek transliteration, Ἰησοῦς (*Iēsous*), of the Hebrew name יְשׁוּעַ (*ye·SHU·aʿ*). "Yeshua" would be closer to the way Jesus pronounced his name; however, since we refer to Jesus so frequently, it would be a burden to our readers to keep tripping over an unfamiliar form of the name.

Incidentally, the spelling "Y'shua" is an English corruption of the name. English-speakers normally shorten a vowel in an unstressed syllable to the "uh" sound — for instance the final "a" in banana or the "o" in collide. In fact, in their pronunciation a vowel in an unstressed syllable is often so short that it is scarcely audible. Since the accent in the word *ye·SHU·aʿ* is on the second syllable, English-speakers have a tendency to slur the first syllable. "Y'shua" is a result of someone spelling Yeshua as they mispronounce it.

Your question raises a larger issue with which the synoptic Gospels confront us. Just as the Hebrew name *ye·SHU·aʿ* has been preserved in Greek, so these Gospels have preserved the biography of Jesus in Greek, although apparently written originally in Hebrew. Returning to the Hebrew form of the records of the sayings and deeds of *ye·SHU·aʿ* enhances our understanding of their meaning.

The value of putting a translation back into its original language and context can be seen more clearly by taking an illustration from the Hebrew Scriptures rather than from the Gospels. Psalm 23 is so well known that we recite its phrases without thinking of their meaning, even though they often are far from clear. The *King James Version* of verse 2 reads: "He leadeth me beside the still waters." Not to speak of the slight misunderstanding that the translation "beside" creates (one should translate "He leads me **to** the still waters"), "still waters" is confusing, and from the sheep's

(continued on page 15)

Cover photo:** **Entrance to one of the caves in cliffs above the ancient settlement of Qumran.
(Courtesy of the Israel Government Press Office)

Jerusalem Perspective

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Spoken Languages in the Time of Jesus

Prof. Safrai presents an over-view of the three languages used in the land of Israel during the days of Jesus, and concludes that Hebrew was the primary language spoken by the Jewish residents at that time.

Shmuel Safrai, one of the senior members of the Jerusalem School, is professor of Jewish History of the Mishnaic and Talmudic Period at the Hebrew University.

by Shmuel Safrai

The land of Israel was under the influence of Greek culture from the time of its conquest by Alexander the Great at the end of the fourth century B.C.E. Although scholars have divergent views regarding the influence of Hellenism on religious works, literature and everyday life in first-century Israel, it is generally accepted that the Greek language was used by many of the inhabitants.

Latin was also used to some extent in the land of Israel in the time of Jesus. For example, John 19:20 and a few manuscripts of Luke 23:38 record that the sign above the cross was written in Hebrew, Latin and Greek, and the names of the Roman legions which served in the land were sometimes inscribed in Latin over wells and on garrison buildings. Apparently, however, Latin was used only by the Romans for matters of army administration. Civil administration was conducted entirely in Greek, and inscriptions written by non-Jews that have been found in Israel are all in Greek.

Greek Influence

Hellenistic cities were founded along the Mediterranean coast and inland in places such as Beth Shean (Scythopolis) at the edge of the Jezreel Valley, and Sebastia in Samaria. Greek was certainly the language used at all levels of government, and there are scarcely any references to translations being used in the course of discussions between Jews and government officials. Josephus, for instance, was sent to Rome at the age of twenty-six, where he met Poppaea the wife of Nero and undoubtedly conversed with her in Greek (Josephus, *The Life* 16).

The Greek-speaking population in the land of Israel was rather small, limited to government officials and clerks and some of the citizenry of Hellenistic cities. The official Greek names of such cities as Ptolemais, Scythopolis or Diospolis were not maintained by their residents. Rather, the ancient Semitic forms such as Acco, Beth Shean and Lod have remained in use down to the present century. The average resident of such cities most likely referred to them by their Semitic names.

The major centers of Jewish diaspora were in Hellenistic lands such as Egypt, Syria, Asia Minor, Greece and Italy, and it was only after the destruction of the Jewish community in Egypt in 117 C.E. during the reign of Trajan that the Aramaic-speaking Babylonian Jewish community became important. Most of the information regarding ties between the land of Israel and diaspora communities indicate that the latter were Greek-oriented and that the use of Hebrew there was rather limited.

Various means were developed to foster ties between the land of Israel and diaspora communities. Letters as well as emissaries were regularly sent out to these communities, and the language used in these contacts for the most part was Greek. The Bible had already been translated into Greek during the early Hellenistic period (third century B.C.E.) for the needs of Egyptian Jewry, translators having been sent from Israel under the aegis of the Jerusalem leadership. Later, the book of Ben Sira was translated into Greek by its author's grandson, a Jerusalemite who emigrated to Egypt.

Hellenistic Jews came on pilgrimage and spent time in Jerusalem, often settling there. Undoubtedly many of the residents

of Jerusalem knew some Greek and may even occasionally have used the language in everyday life. For the most part, though, Greek was not the predominant language heard in the streets or marketplaces of Jerusalem, nor in the other Jewish cities and villages of the land of Israel.

The Role of Aramaic

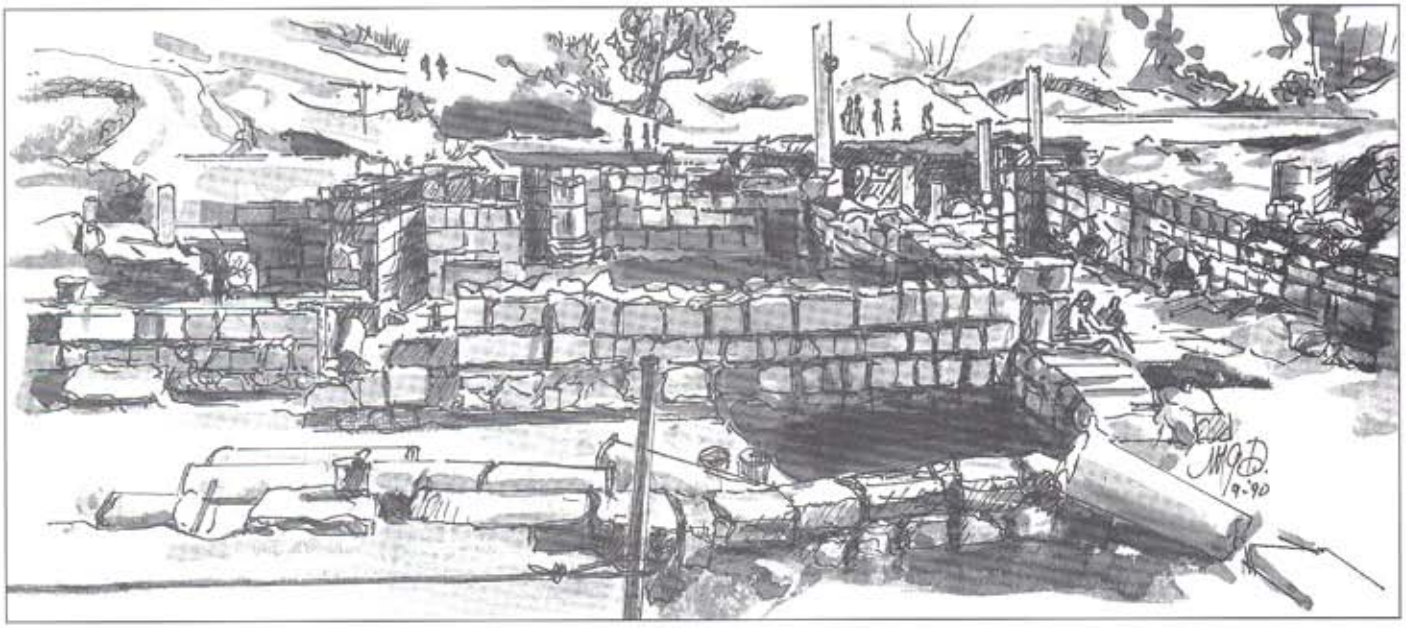
Aramaic was quite widespread in Jerusalem and in other parts of the land, as can be seen from the large number of Aramaic inscriptions which have been discovered dating from the Second Temple period. The use of Aramaic is also evident from the literature created in that language. The Genesis Apocryphon, the Targum of Job and portions of several other Aramaic works were found in the ancient library of the Essenes at Qumran, and Jewish sources of the period mention additional non-extant works.

Aramaic also had a strong influence on Mishnaic Hebrew, and Aramaic words are found in the New Testament and in the writings of Josephus. Unlike in countries such as Egypt where Aramaic almost disappeared when the country came under the influence of Hellenism, Aramaic remained a vibrant language in the land of Israel and Syria even during the centuries of Græco-Roman rule until the Arab conquest at the beginning of the seventh century C.E.

Aramaic was the language of communication between Jews and those non-Jews not connected with the government or living in Greek cities. An ordinary non-Jew mentioned in rabbinic literature is referred to as an Aramean and generally has an Aramaic rather than a Greek name (Tosefta, Pesahim 1:27). It is possible that some Roman officials who served long periods of time in the land of Israel learned Aramaic, and Jews may have been able to converse with these officials in Aramaic.

However, the role of Aramaic in everyday life should not be exaggerated. Many scholars who admit the widespread use of Hebrew in the last few generations of the Second Temple period claim that Temple services were conducted in Aramaic. While there were a number of Aramaic words and phrases associated with the administration of the Temple and Temple area, the vast majority of references relating to Temple life reflect the use of Hebrew there. The Mishnah preserves many descriptions of various aspects of everyday life in the Temple, including statements of Temple officials which almost always are in Hebrew. Moreover, to date all of the inscriptions found in the Temple area are written in Hebrew, except for two Greek inscriptions, originally part of a balustrade surrounding the inner Temple, which warned Gentiles not to go beyond that point.

Tannaic and amoraic sources state that it was customary in the synagogue to translate the readings from the Torah and the Prophets into Aramaic. Rendering the Scriptures into Aramaic offered an opportunity to introduce into the readings elements of the Oral Torah in popular form. This was done for the benefit of religiously uneducated people who may not have completely understood Biblical Hebrew. One rabbinic



Partially reconstructed streets and buildings of the fifth century A.D. Roman city of Scythopolis (Beth Shean).
(Illustration by Margaret Dickinson)

source explicitly states: "...and he translates [into Aramaic] so that the rest of the people, and the women and children, will understand it" (Tractate Soferim 18:4).

However, the custom of translating the readings of the Torah and Prophets into Aramaic is not mentioned in any source before approximately 140 C.E. Sources from the second Temple period and the era immediately following the destruction of the Temple do not reflect this custom. The phenomenon of sages understanding Biblical Hebrew while the rest of the population required a translation is the reality of a later period and was not the situation during the first century C.E.

Mishnaic Hebrew

Either Hebrew or Aramaic was used in the synagogue or at other communal gatherings, but there are a number of questions concerning the relationship of these two languages in the land of Israel. The Torah and Prophets were undoubtedly read in Hebrew, as were prayers, but what was the language of Torah instruction in the synagogue? In what language did people speak in the marketplace and within the family circle? In which tongue did the sages address their students? Was there a difference between Judea and Galilee?

Most scholars since the beginning of the nineteenth century have concluded that Aramaic was the spoken language of the land of Israel during the Second Temple period. Even when scribes of that period or later attest that they wrote or transmitted traditions in Hebrew, scholars have persisted in claiming that this "Hebrew" was actually some type of Aramaic dialect then prevalent among the Jews of the land. It has even been claimed that the Hebrew in which the Mishnah was written was an artificial language of the בית מדרש (*bet mid·RASH*, house of study) which was a translation from Aramaic, or at the very least heavily influenced by Aramaic.

However, some seventy years ago a number of Jewish scholars in Palestine (later the State of Israel) began to see that the Hebrew of the Mishnah had been a living and vibrant language, spoken in the house of study, synagogue, on the street and at home. Mishnaic Hebrew does not deal only with matters of religion, but mentions, for instance, the names of dozens of implements used at the time, and records thousands of events and sayings about mundane, secular aspects of life.

***Bar-Kochva letter. Written in Hebrew on papyrus, the letter begins: "From Shim'on ben [son of] Kosva to Yeshua ben Galgoula and to the men of the fort,* Shalom."**
(Courtesy of the Shrine of the Book, Israel Museum)

Other studies have shown that Mishnaic Hebrew is significantly different from Biblical Hebrew in vocabulary, grammar and syntax. As the mid-third-century B.C.E. sage Rabbi Yochanan put it: "The language of the Torah unto itself, the language of the sages unto itself" (Babylonian Talmud, Avodah Zarah 58^{b}). Mishnaic Hebrew was an independent dialect and existed together with Biblical Hebrew, the latter being the language in which the Torah was read, the former the language of conversation, prayer and the Oral Torah. Mishnaic Hebrew differs from Biblical Hebrew, but not because it was translated from Aramaic as some scholars have thought. Rather it is the result of independent linguistic and historical developments related to the Hebrew language itself in the Second Temple period.

Samaritan commentaries and translations of the Scriptures have preserved traces of Mishnaic Hebrew. The language of Christians in the land of Israel, particularly those living in the southern part of the land, also shows the impact of Mishnaic Hebrew. These Christians continued to write in Aramaic until at least the sixth century, and their Aramaic was greatly influenced by Mishnaic Hebrew, but not at all by Biblical Hebrew.

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the documents from the period of the Bar-Kochba revolt (132–135 C.E.) conclusively settled the question of whether Mishnaic Hebrew had been an artificial or a

A view from the ancient settlement of Qumran of the cliffs above and to the west of the settlement. *(Illustration by Margaret Dickinson)*

living language. Hymns, prayers and biblical works written in Hebrew were discovered, as well as documents composed in the Mishnaic Hebrew dialect. Among them were letters containing Hebrew slang and abbreviated Hebrew forms characteristic of everyday speech. These discoveries prompted the biblical scholar J.T. Milik to conclude: "The thesis of such scholars as Segal, Ben-Yehuda and Klausner that Mishnaic Hebrew was a language spoken by the population of Judea in the Persian and Græco-Roman periods can no longer be considered an assumption, but rather an established fact" (*Discoveries in the Judaean Desert* [Oxford University Press, 1961], 2:70).

Rabbinic Literature

When the Jewish writers of the Second Temple period referred to Hebrew, they meant Hebrew and not Aramaic. They did not confuse the two languages, but distinguished quite clearly between Hebrew and Aramaic, referring to the latter either as "Aramaic," "*targum*" or "Syriac" (סורסית, *sur-SIT*).

The sages also clearly differentiated between the Hebrew and Aramaic sections of the Bible. The Mishnah states:

> The Aramaic passages in Ezra and Daniel render the hands unclean. If any of these passages were written in Hebrew, or if passages from the Hebrew Scriptures were written in Aramaic ... they do not render the hands unclean. (Mishnah, Yadayim 4:5)

Rabbi Yochanan of Beth Guvrin is likewise quite clear in distinguishing among different languages:

> There are four languages which are fitting to be used by all. And they are: Greek for song, Latin for combat, Aramaic for dirges and Hebrew for conversation. (Jerusalem Talmud, Megillah 71[b])

The Tosefta gives a further rabbinic ruling:

> One cannot fulfill the obligation of reading from the Torah scroll unless the text is written in square script in Hebrew and in a book [some manuscripts read "on parchment"] and in ink. (Tosefta, Megillah 2:6)

In other words, the Torah scroll must be written in square Hebrew script and not in the old archaic Hebrew script, nor in Aramaic.

In Midrash Tanhuma we again find an example of the distinction the sages made between Hebrew and Aramaic:

> Rabbi Yehudah ha-Levi son of Shalom [said]: "In Hebrew it is called יַיִן [*YA-yin*, wine] and in Aramaic חַמְרָא [*ha-MAR*, wine]." (Shemini 5 [ed. Buber, p. 13[b]])

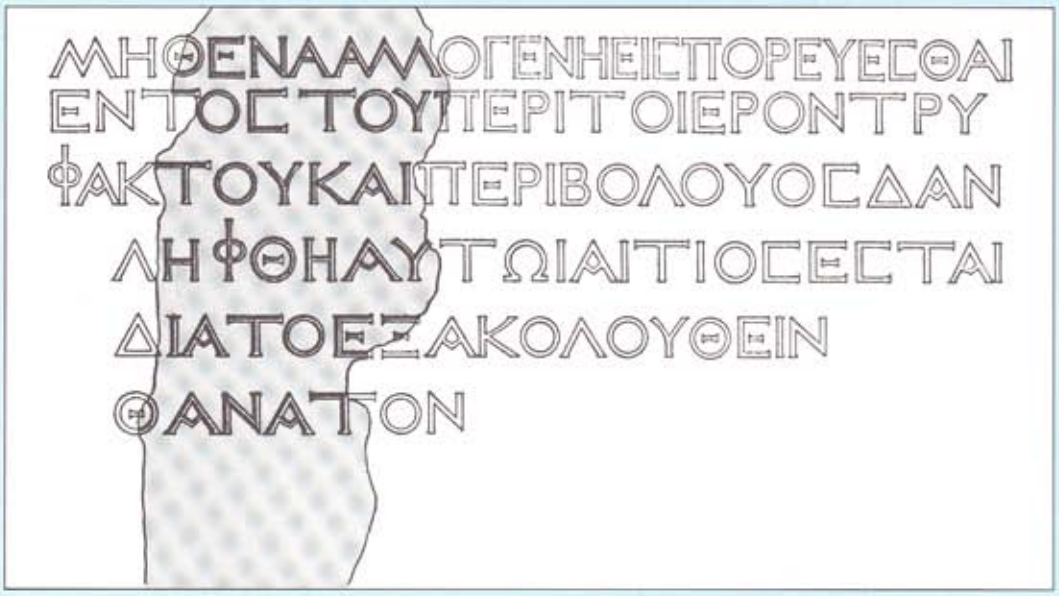
The Writings of Josephus

Josephus' references to the "language of the Hebrews" also indicates the Hebrew language. In his introduction to *The Jewish Antiquities* he states: "For it [his book] will embrace our entire ancient history and political constitution, translated from the Hebrew records" (*Antiquities* 1:5). The Hebrew records he refers to are the Bible.

In his discussion of creation and the Sabbath he states: "For which reason we also pass this day in repose from toil and call it Sabbath, a word which in the Hebrew language means 'rest'" (*Antiquities* 1:33). This makes sense only if Hebrew and not Aramaic is intended because in Aramaic the root נוח (*n-v-h*) rather than שבת (*sh-b-t*) is used for "to rest."

II Kings 18 tells of the Assyrian general Rabshakeh's advance on Jerusalem and his attempt to persuade the beleaguered inhabitants of the city to surrender. The leaders of Jerusalem requested that he speak Aramaic and "not the language of Judea" so that the rest of the city's inhabitants would not understand (v. 26). Josephus relates the story in the following manner:

> As Rabshakeh spoke these words in Hebrew, with which language he was familiar, Eliakim was afraid that the people might overhear them and be



Stone fragment of a Greek inscription, dating from the period of Herod the Great, warning Gentiles to stay out of the inner temple. Josephus describes these warning notices: "Proceeding across this [the temple courtyard] towards the second court of the temple, one found it surrounded by a stone balustrade [Hebrew soreg, Middot 2:3] three cubits high [c. 4½ feet] and of exquisite workmanship; in this at regular intervals stood slabs giving warning, some in Greek, others in Latin characters, of the law of purification, to wit that no foreigner was permitted to enter the holy place, for so the second enclosure of the temple was called" (The Jewish War 5:193–194).

The fragment pictured on the right was discovered in 1935 outside Lions' Gate of the Old City of Jerusalem. It is shown on the left within a drawing of the reconstructed inscription, which in translation reads: "No foreigner may pass beyond the balustrade and rampart around the sanctuary. Anyone caught will have only himself to blame for his resultant death."

According to Acts 21:26ff., a major riot took place in the Temple when diaspora Jews accused Paul of having brought "Greeks" inside the barrier.

Dimensions of stone fragment: 49 cm. high, 27 cm. wide, 31 cm. thick.
(Courtesy of the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums)

> thrown into consternation, and he asked him to speak in συριστί [*suristi*, Syriac, i.e., Aramaic]. (Antiquities 10:8)

The language of the Jews and of the Bible is clearly Hebrew according to Josephus, while Aramaic is called Syriac, as is often the case in rabbinic literature.

In his *The Jewish War*, Josephus states that in order to deliver Titus' message and persuade the inhabitants of Jerusalem to surrender, he approached the walls of Jerusalem. Since Josephus wanted not only John of Gischala to understand, but also the entire population, he delivered the message in Hebrew (*War* 6:96). It would seem, therefore, that Hebrew was commonly spoken and understood in Jerusalem in 70 C.E.

Josephus sometimes discusses the etymology of an Aramaic word without explicitly saying that it is Aramaic. For instance, he remarks about one Aramaic word that "we learned it from the Babylonians" (*Antiquities* 3:156). He never once states that an Aramaic word was Hebrew. On the other hand, when speaking of the year of Jubilee, Josephus mentions that "the fiftieth year is called by the Hebrews ἰώβηλος [*iōbēlos*]" (*Antiquities* 3:282). *Iōbēlos* is a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew word יובל (*yo·VEL*).

Galilee and Judea

There is an oft-repeated claim in scholarly literature that a high percentage of the Galilean population was religiously uneducated, and that the people consequently knew and used less Hebrew. Literary sources, however, provide no indication that this claim is correct.

There are a number of "anti-Galilee" statements in rabbinic literature, but one can find similar barbs directed against residents of other regions of the land. What the sources do indicate is that Galilee belonged to the accepted cultural milieu of Judaism at that time, including the world of Torah study, and that culturally and spiritually Galilee may have been closer to Jerusalem than Judea.

There is a statement in rabbinic literature that the Judeans retained the teachings of their Torah scholars because they

The Genesis Apocryphon, one of the original seven Qumran Cave One scrolls, before unrolling.
(Courtesy of the Shrine of the Book, Israel Museum)

were careful in the use of their language, while the Galileans, who were not so careful with their speech, did not retain their learning (Babylonian Talmud, Eruvin 53[a–b]; Jerusalem Talmud, Berachot 4[d], *et al.*). While this saying is sometimes considered to be evidence for the dominance of Aramaic over Hebrew in Galilee because some of the examples discussed are in Aramaic, it actually only refers to the Judeans' feeling that Galileans mispronounced the guttural letters ח (*het*) and ע (*ʿA·yin*) and dropped the weak letters א (*ʾA·lef*) and ה (*he*ʾ). This in no way reflects on the cultural status of Galilee, nor does it show that the use of Hebrew was less common there than in Judea or Jerusalem.

The New Testament

When Paul spoke to the Roman commander, he used Greek (Acts 21:37). When he addressed the people, however, he spoke to them "in the Hebrew language" (Acts 21:40).

Hebrew-speakers commonly referred to Jews as יִשְׂרָאֵל (*yis·ra·ʾEL*, Israel), in contrast to Ἰουδαῖοι (*Ioudaioi*, Jews) used by Greek-speakers and יְהוּדָאִין (*ye·hu·da·ʾIN*, Jews) used by Aramaic-speakers. In literary works written in Hebrew, Jews refer to themselves as יִשְׂרָאֵל (*yis·ra·ʾEL*, Israel) or בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (*be·NE yis·ra·ʾEL*, sons of Israel), while non-Jews refer to Jews using the Aramaicized יְהוּדָאִין (*ye·hu·da·ʾIN*, Jews).

When the author of the Book of Acts refers to Jews he normally uses the term Ἰουδαῖοι (*Ioudaioi*, Jews). However, when he relates the words of Jesus or of Peter and his companions, he has them refer to Jews as Ἰσραήλ (*Israël*, Israel) (Acts 1:6; 2:22; 2:36; 3:12; 4:10; 9:15). The author of the Book of Acts also relates that Rabban Gamaliel addressed the Sanhedrin as "Men of Israel" (5:35).

Jesus probably spoke Hebrew within the circle of his disciples, and since the thousands of parables which have survived in rabbinic literature are all in Hebrew, no doubt he likewise told his parables in Hebrew.

The view that Aramaic was the language of conversation in first-century Israel seems to be supported by the Aramaic words found in the New Testament. Many scholars have seen Jesus' words to Jairus' twelve-year-old daughter, "*Talitha cumi*" (Mk. 5:41), as proof that he spoke Aramaic. Yet, even if Jesus spoke to her in Hebrew, he could have said "*Talitha cumi*." One must not forget that many Aramaic words in various forms found their way into Hebrew in the Second Temple period. The command to "get up" (קוּמִי, *KU·mi*) is the same word in Hebrew and Aramaic.

In any event, the parallels in Matthew and Luke (Mt. 9:25, Lk. 8:54) indicate that "*Talitha cumi*" is more likely a Markan dramatization. According to R.L. Lindsey, Mark, in targumic fashion, picks up "*cumi*" from a similar story in Acts 9 where Peter commands a dead woman "*Tabitha cumi*," and inserts it here (*A Hebrew Translation of the Gospel of Mark*, p. 63). It is typical of Mark to do this, and it is also Mark who gives us most of the Aramaic words in the synoptic Gospels.

Scholars have also viewed Jesus' words from the cross, "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani*," as proof that he spoke Aramaic. These words, recorded in Mark 15:34 and Matthew 27:46, are an Aramaic translation of Psalm 22:1, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me." However, according to Luke 23:46, Jesus quoted Psalm 31:5, "Into your hands I commit my spirit."

It seems likely that Jesus, who in the last days before his crucifixion had already told his disciples of his impending death and its meaning, would recite in his final moments the verse from Psalm 31, "Into your hands I commit my spirit," rather than the verse from Psalm 22, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me." Stephen later also quoted from Psalm 31:5 as he was being put to death (Acts 7:59; Cf. John 19:30), and Peter likewise exhorted those who were sharing the sufferings of Jesus to commit their souls to God (I Pet. 4:19). Here too it would seem, as Lindsey has suggested, that Mark is substituting synonymic equivalents for the more original text preserved in Luke (*A Hebrew Translation of the Gospel of Mark*, pp. 40–41).

This is not the only instance of Mark replacing a Scripture quotation in a parallel Lukan passage with a different Scripture quotation. According to Luke 3:22, the heavenly voice at Jesus' baptism quoted

(continued on page 13)

The Bar-Kochva Letters

Documents recently discovered in the Judean Wilderness near the Dead Sea provide some insight into the use of Hebrew in the land of Israel not long after the time of Jesus.

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by David Pileggi

The Bar-Kochva (also written Bar-Kochba and Bar-Kokhba) uprising, which took place during the years 132–135 A.D., was the last Jewish attempt to throw off the Roman yoke. It broke out sixty-two years after Rome destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem (70 A.D.), and only fifteen years following a Jewish insurrection against Roman authority in North Africa, Cyprus and Mesopotamia. But while the Bar-Kochva revolt is one of the most significant events in Jewish history, it lacked a chronicler like Josephus, and as a result we have no detailed account of the war or its devastating consequences.

The Revolt

Meager references to the war can be found in rabbinic literature, the records of the church fathers, and several classical historians writing long after the revolt. According to Roman sources, the rebellion broke out when the Emperor Hadrian banned circumcision throughout the Empire under penalty of death. The Jews of Israel were further angered by the Emperor's intention to rebuild Jerusalem as a Roman city with pagan temples, including a temple to Jupiter on the site of the Jewish Temple. Although Rome was aware that these measures would provoke the Jews, they were unprepared for the events that followed.

Unlike earlier revolts, the Jews planned carefully before confronting the military might of Rome. Funds for the uprising were secretly collected from Jews in the diaspora, while fortifications were built and arms collected. Most importantly, a unified military command was established to guide the uprising and prevent the self-defeating civil strife that characterized the revolt of 66 A.D.

Before the discovery of the Bar-Kochva letters, scholars were uncertain about just who led the fight against the Romans. The name Bar-Kochva (בַּר כּוֹכְבָא, *bar kokh·VA'*, son of the star), in Greek or Latin transliterations, was found only in Christian sources, compiled long after the revolt was crushed. The leader's actual name was Shim'on Bar-Kosva (שִׁמְעוֹן בַּר כּוֹסְבָא, *shim·'ON bar kos·VA'*). During the war his name was slightly changed on the basis of a popular interpretation of Numbers 24:17, "There shall come forth a star [*kochav*] out of Jacob," and so he was called "Bar-Kochva." Rabbi Akiva, one of the leading sages of the day, declared Bar-Kochva to be the long awaited "king messiah," and the rebel leader himself adopted the title of נָשִׂיא (*na·SI'*, prince) of Israel, which according to rabbinic literature and the Dead Sea Scrolls was one of the titles that belonged to the Messiah. But by the end of the revolt, most messianic expectations were dashed and the rebel leader was given a new name, Bar-Kozva (בַּר כּוֹזְבָא, *bar koz·VA'*, son of a lie), apparently by those disappointed with his failure to bring about the promised redemption of Israel.

Desert Discoveries

Firsthand information on the revolt and Bar-Kochva himself came to light in 1951 when Bedouin discovered documents from

Bar-Kochva letter in Hebrew on papyrus. Addressed to Yeshua ben Galgoula, Bar-Kochva requests that ben Galgoula send him five* kors *(50–60 bushels) of wheat after the Sabbath is over.
Dimensions: 12 cm. high, 9.7 cm. wide.
(Courtesy of the Shrine of the Book, Israel Museum)

The "four species" used in many of the synagogue ceremonies that take place during Sukkot. While holding the four species together, one recites a special blessing on each day of Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles.
(Courtesy of the Israel Government Press Office)

the period of the Bar-Kochva rebellion in a cave south of Qumran, in what was then Jordan. These documents revealed Bar-Kochva's true name for the first time. By the late 1950s it was already apparent that Bedouin were slipping across Israel's frontier from Jordan in their search for ancient documents. These they sold to eager collectors in Jordanian-controlled East Jerusalem.

The developments concerned Israel's then-Prime Minister and Minister of Defense David Ben Gurion. He ordered the army to step up their patrols in the Judean Desert to put a stop to the infiltrations. The Army Chief of Staff, Haim Laskov, suggested that Israel take the offensive and launch its own archaeological expedition to the area. He promised army help in exploring inaccessible desert caves, and Ben Gurion enthusiastically agreed to the plan.

Thus it was that in March, 1960, Israeli archaeologists carried out their own systematic search of the Judean Desert. The large-scale expedition concentrated its search on the canyons between Masada and Ein-Gedi. Four noted archaeologists divided the rugged region into four zones. After being surveyed by helicopter, the most promising caves were explored by paratroop volunteers who dangled at the end of ropes hundreds of meters above the canyon floors. If the soldiers spotted any sign of ancient habitation, army engineers would prepare rope ladders and build trails to allow archaeologists access to the site.

The Letters

All four teams were successful in uncovering ancient coins and documents of historical value. However, the most significant discoveries fell to Prof. Yigael Yadin. On the northern side of the Hever Canyon, he found a cave that had been occupied by supporters of Bar-Kochva seeking refuge from the advancing Roman armies. Apparently among those hiding in the cave — now known as the Cave of Letters — were the two military commanders of nearby Ein-Gedi. A batch of eighteen letters, most of which were from Bar-Kochva's headquarters to these officers before they took refuge in the cave, were found hidden in a water skin. Composed in Aramaic and Hebrew (and in two cases in Greek), all but one of the letters were written on papyrus. The single exception was inscribed on four narrow slats of wood.

The letters, which were written towards the close of the revolt, provide an indispensable insight into the way the country was governed during its three years of independence, and reveal that Bar-Kochva ran an orderly administration with the help of scribes trained in the Hellenistic official procedure. Most of the documents found deal with mobilization orders and supplies.

A number of the letters show Bar-Kochva to be concerned with fulfillment of the commandments, despite the difficult wartime conditions. In an Aramaic letter he orders the commander of a town near Bethlehem to supply the troops in Beitar with the "four species" (date palm frond, myrtle branch, citron and willow branch) needed to celebrate Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles. In another communique, written in Hebrew,

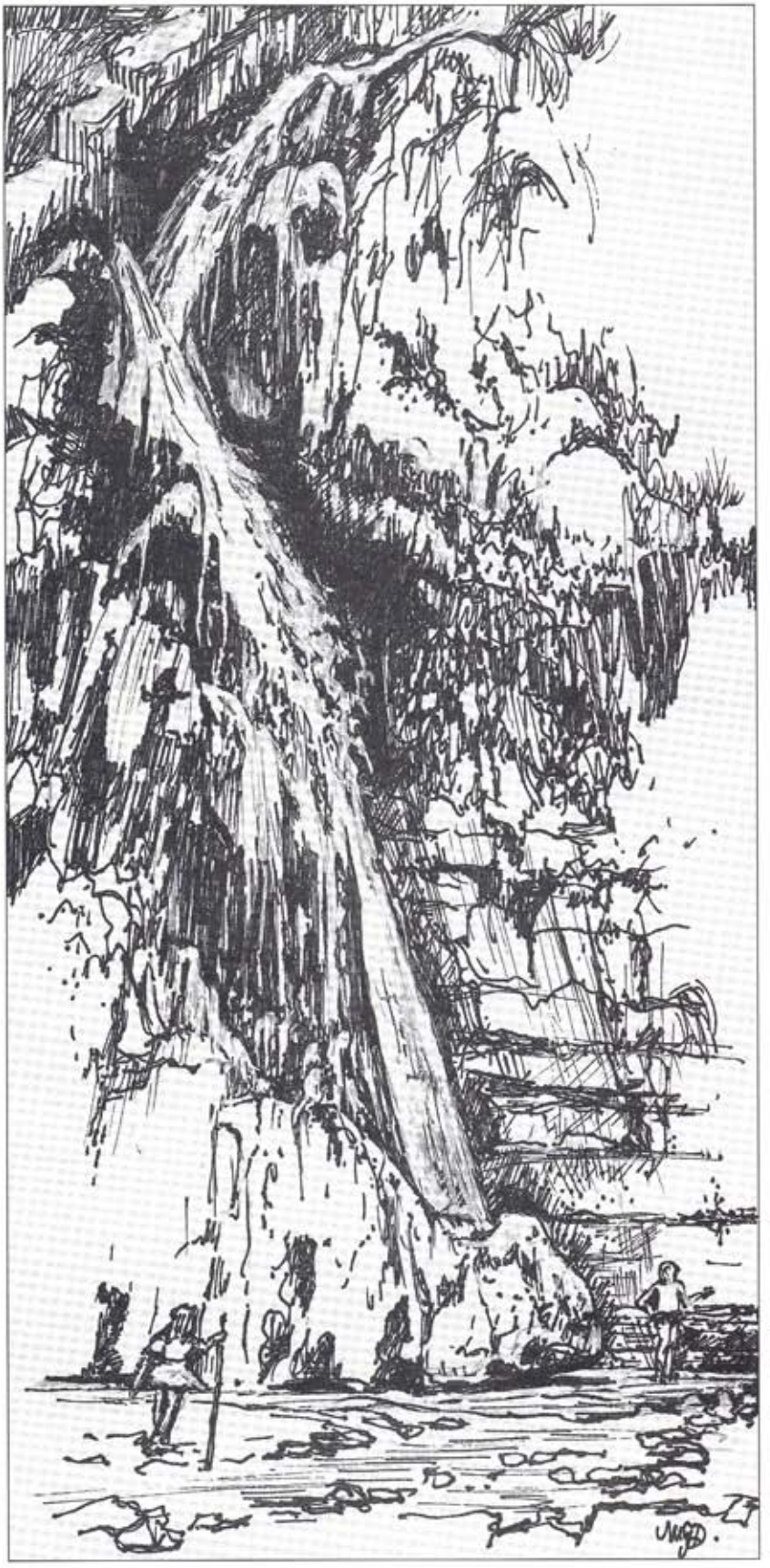
Bar-Kochva reproaches the commanders of Ein-Gedi for not sending supplies to the front fast enough: "In comfort you sit, eat and drink from the property of the House of Israel, and care nothing for your brothers." The portrait of Bar-Kochva that emerges from Yadin's finds is that of a stern leader who did not tolerate the slightest opposition from his subordinates.

In 1961 Yadin returned to the Cave of Letters for another search. His team once again hit pay dirt, finding five small, tightly rolled papyri. Examination showed the documents to be deeds, three in Hebrew and two in Aramaic. The Hebrew documents clearly were written by an expert scribe, with the script being similar to printed Hebrew used today.

Even though the deeds were drawn up by a professional scribe, they contain a number of colloquialisms causing some scholars to suggest that contrary to popular assumption, Hebrew at the time was a living and developing language. This is also reflected in the economic and military documents found in the Judean Desert. Yadin suggests that Bar-Kochva may have gone as far as making Hebrew the official language of the newly-established Jewish state (*Bar-Kokhba*, p. 124). The widespread use of Hebrew in the period is confirmed by coins minted during the revolt. All fifty-one different types of coin found from that period have Hebrew inscriptions.

Information gleaned from the deeds turned out to be especially valuable to scholars. The lease agreements contain details on crops, irrigation and business practices of the period. Yadin also unearthed the largest collection of ancient documents ever discovered in Israel — a batch of thirty-five papyrus manuscripts (three in Aramaic, six in Nabatean, seventeen in Greek, and nine in Greek with subscriptions and signatures in Aramaic or Nabatean). They belonged to a wealthy Jewish woman by the name of Babata, and among her papers were legal documents such as deeds, mortgages and papers relating to loans, and even Babata's marriage contract. Babata grew up in Nabatea, so her personal papers were naturally in Nabatean as well as Aramaic and Greek.

Her archive, like the other documents from the days of Bar-Kochva, continue to contribute to our knowledge of the history, languages and culture of Israel and her neighbors just one hundred years after the time of Jesus. JP



Waterfalls in the David Canyon near the oasis of Ein-Gedi. The waterfalls are fed by the same springs that feed the oasis.
(Illustration by Margaret Dickinson)

What Is the Priest Doing?

Common Sense and Culture

Randall Buth, a member of the Jerusalem School, is a translator and consultant with Wycliffe Bible Translators in Africa.

by Randall Buth

A little story from the birth narratives in Luke shows how our cultural background can create a translation problem. Luke 1:21–22 in the *Revised Standard Version* reads:

> And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they wondered at his delay in the temple. And when he came out, he could not speak to them, and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple; and he made signs to them and remained dumb.

Common sense is connected to cultural expectations, and what is understandable in one culture is opaque in another. In the story above it is clear that the people outside the temple understood that Zechariah had had a vision. What is not clear is how they got that information.

Common Sense?

A translator in Africa once suggested to me that Zechariah was using sign language to explain to the people that he had seen a vision. Thus, in the passage above, the clause "and he made signs to them" was the means by which the people learned about the vision. To that translator, the instrumental relationship between the people's perception and Zechariah's signs was one of common sense. That, he argued, was the significance of Luke's "and," which seems a plausible enough argument considering the influence of Hebrew structures on Luke and the practice of Hebrew simply to use "and" without specifying the exact relationship between two clauses.

One could translate such a relationship in modern English as, "They perceived that he had seen a vision **by** the signs that he was making...." In more idiomatic English the *New International Version* suggests this interpretation:

> When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, **for** he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

Even more explicit is *The Living Bible*:

> ...and they realized **from his gestures** that he must have seen a vision in the Temple.

Such an understanding makes sense as it stands, but there is additional cultural information that can change our understanding of the original situation.

More Cultural Background

There was a unique expectation connected to any priest who entered the temple. This was where God placed a special sanctity and was specially present, and people were concerned that nothing should go amiss whenever a priest entered the area. On the Day of Atonement the high priest, after offering incense in the Holy of Holies, paused for a moment in the sanctuary to pray a short prayer before returning to the courtyard where the assembled people were waiting. The Mishnah states that "he did not make the prayer long so as not to frighten Israel" (Yoma 5:1).

The people's anxiety when a priest remained too long within the sanctuary is illustrated by an incident that happened to a high priest, possibly Shim'on the Righteous who served as high priest around 200 B.C.:

> Once a certain high priest made a long prayer and [his fellow priests] decided to go in after him — they say this high priest was Shim'on the Righteous. They said to him: "Why did you pray so long?" He said to them: "I was praying that the temple of your God would not be destroyed." They said to him: "Even so, you shouldn't have prayed so long." (Jerusalem Talmud, Yoma 42^{c})

The People's Expectation

Luke recounts that "the people wondered at Zechariah's delay in the temple." The people's common sense had already realized that something was amiss, and that for good or bad there probably was a divine visitation taking place. When Zechariah came out and could not talk, their suspicions were immediately confirmed — the content of Zechariah's sign language was unnecessary for reaching that conclusion. Luke, in fact, never tells us exactly what Zechariah was trying to say, though we might assume he was not only trying to communicate that there had been a supernatural visitation, but also what the angel had told him, some of the awe and terror that he felt, and what he planned to do. Luke's statement that "he was making signs to them and remained dumb" focuses on the resultant condition of Zechariah.

A culturally more appropriate translation would retain a major break between the people's perception and Zechariah's sign making. The *Revised Standard Version* does this, and the *Good News Bible* has a good, idiomatic English version of Luke 1:21–22:

> In the meantime the people were waiting for Zechariah, wondering why he was spending such a long time in the Temple. When he came out he could not speak to them — and so they knew that he had seen a vision in the Temple. Unable to say a word, he made signs to them with his hands. JP

Spoken Languages

(continued from page 8)

Psalm 2:7, "You are my son, today I have begotten you." However for this same scenario Mark substitutes the words of the heavenly voice at the transfiguration, "You are my beloved son; with you I am well pleased" (Mk. 1:11), a combination of Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1.

Conclusion

Hebrew was certainly the language of instruction in schools, as well as the language of prayer and Torah reading. The language of instruction in the house of study also most certainly was Hebrew, and this was likely the case regarding instruction in the synagogue. It would seem that Hebrew was spoken in the marketplaces of Jerusalem (Jerusalem Talmud, Pesahim 37^{d}), but there is not enough information to determine whether this also was the case in other cities. It is not impossible that there were religiously uneducated people who did not understand Hebrew and were conversant only in Aramaic. There is some evidence for this linguistic phenomenon beginning in the second century C.E., but it is unlikely that such was the case in the first century.

Although the Jewish inhabitants of the land of Israel in the time of Jesus knew Aramaic and used it in their contacts with the ordinary, non-Jewish residents, Hebrew was their first or native language. It is especially clear that in enlightened circles such as those of Jesus and his disciples, Hebrew was the dominant spoken language. JP

Glossary

amoraic — pertaining to the Amoraim (אֲמוֹרָאִים, *ʾa·mo·ra·ʾIM*), the sages of the post-mishnaic period, as distinguished from the earlier Tannaim (תַּנָּאִים, *ta·na·ʾIM*), the sages of the mishnaic period. Roughly speaking, the Tannaim are the sages quoted in the Mishnah and contemporary rabbinic works, while the Amoraim are the sages mentioned in the Talmud.

diaspora (dī·as′pə·rə) — the area outside the land of Israel settled by Jews, or the Jews who settled there.

Mishnah — (מִשְׁנָה, *mish·NAH*) the collection of Oral Torah compiled around 200 A.D. by Rabbi Yehudah ha-Nasi. It records the sayings of sages who lived and taught during the previous several hundred years. Their sayings, formulated to be most effective in the oral mode, were jotted down in brief notes by students in the audience, thus the Mishnah primarily reflects the spoken rather than written language.

Mishnaic Hebrew — the Hebrew spoken in the land of Israel during the first centuries B.C./A.D. Used loosely to refer to post-biblical Hebrew. Since this dialect of Hebrew is the language of all the rabbinic works composed during this period, not just that of the Mishnah, it also is referred to as "rabbinic Hebrew."

Nabatea (nab·ə·tē′·ə) — ancient kingdom southeast of the land of Israel whose capital was Petra.

Nabatean — pertaining to Nabatea or the Nabateans; the language of the Nabateans.

tannaic (tə·nā′ik) — pertaining to the Tannaim (תַּנָּאִים, *ta·na·ʾIM*), sages from Hillel (died c. 10 B.C.) to those of the generation after Rabbi Yehudah ha-Nasi (c. 230 A.D.), the compiler of the Mishnah.

targum — an Aramaic translation of a portion of the Hebrew Scriptures. Plural: *targumim* or targums. The *targumim* not only provided a translation for those who did not understand the original language, but also provided an interpretation of the biblical text. Since the inspired text could not be changed or altered in even the smallest way, the targum made possible the insertion of various explanations and clarifications which amplified the text. According to the targum of the Book of Ruth, for instance, there was a *mighty* famine in the land; a certain *great* man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab; his two sons were *chief* Ephrathites who, when they came to Moab, were *governors* there (italics highlights the differences in the Aramaic text of the targum compared to the Hebrew original).

The targum dramatizes and adds additional information. That is what is meant by "targumic fashion" in Prof. Safrai's article, "Spoken Languages in the Time of Jesus."

תַּנַ"ךְ — *ta·NAK*: Writings

Lesson 27

by David Bivin

The third and last letter of תַּנַ"ךְ (*ta·NAK*), the Hebrew acronym for the Jewish Bible, is ך (*kaf*). It stands for the word כְּתוּבִים (*ke·tu·VIM*, Writings, Hagiographa), the third of the Jewish Bible's three divisions.

The first letter in כְּתוּבִים (*ke·tu·VIM*), the כ (*kaf*), is a new letter. It is pronounced like the "k" in kite, but is never silent like the "k" in knit. It is the eleventh letter of the Hebrew alphabet and its numerical value is 20. In the system of transliteration used in JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE, the *kaf* is represented by "k."

The singular form of כְּתוּבִים (*ke·tu·VIM*) is כָּתוּב (*ka·TUV*), which literally means "written" or "written down." Derived from this is a second meaning which came into use around the time of Jesus: "a verse or saying from the Bible."

In pointed script the *kaf* sometimes appears with a dot inside it, as above, and sometimes without the dot. In the latter case the כ is more precisely called a *k̲af*, and is pronounced like "ch" in the Scottish *loch* or the German *ach*. Technically, the *k̲af* is an "open" k sound produced by forcing voiceless breath through a loose contact of the back of the tongue with the soft palate at the same point where a firm contact would stop the breath and make the k sound.

There is no equivalent sound in English, and therefore in our system of transliteration it is represented by an underlined k, the symbol generally used by linguists. English versions of the Bible usually transliterate a *k̲af* in proper names with "ch," as in Yochebed (Ex. 6:20), Achan (Josh. 7:1) and Lachish (II Ki. 14:19). The form of *kaf* that appears in the acronym תַּנַ"ךְ (*ta·NAK*) is pronounced exactly like the כ (*k̲af*), and so we represent it with the symbol k̲.

כ/ך assumes a special form — ך — when it appears as the last letter of a word. There are four other Hebrew consonants which have special final forms, and we have previously learned the final form of the מ (*mem*) — ם (Lesson Fifteen, *JP*, December 1988).

Under the horizontal bar of the final *kaf* in the acronym תַּנַ"ךְ we see two vertical dots. This is the vowel symbol called *she·VA'*. In pointed Hebrew text, a *she·VA'* is not generally added to the final consonant of the final syllable of a word, however a *she·VA'* is always added to a final *kaf*. This came about in the time of the Masoretes (sixth–ninth centuries A.D.) because the forms of the final *kaf* (ך) and the final *nun* (ן), the "n" sound, were easily confused. If a scribe made the horizontal bar of the final *kaf* a little short, it looked like the final *nun*, and a later copyist might accidentally write it as a *nun*. To prevent confusion, scribes added *she·VA'* to the final *kaf*. We previously learned (Lesson 21, *JP*, Jul/Aug 1989), that a *she·VA'* at the end of a syllable is silent, so the *she·VA'* accompanying a final *kaf* has no effect on pronunciation.

Reading Practice

Now we have learned enough letters and vowels of the Hebrew language to read and pronounce a number of other words, including the word for one of the basic concepts in Judaism — שַׁבָּת (*sha·BAT*, day of rest; Sabbath).

שַׁבָּת appears almost two hundred times in the Hebrew Scriptures. Its root (*sh-b-t*) means "cease, rest." The fourth of the Ten Commandments is "Remember the *sha·BAT* and keep it holy" (Ex. 20:8).

As we learned in Lesson Sixteen (*JP*, January 1989), the usual Hebrew greeting is שָׁלוֹם (*sha·LOM*, Peace!). On the Sabbath there is a special greeting or blessing: שַׁבָּת שָׁלוֹם (*sha·BAT sha·LOM*, Sabbath of peace).

With just a slight change in vowels and pronunciation, we have a verb rather than a noun — שָׁבַת (*sha·VAT*, he or it ceased,

rested), which often means "to stop working." On the seventh day of creation, God *sha·VAT* (Gen. 2:2–3).

The Gospels make it clear that Jesus and his disciples observed the Sabbath. Luke 23:56, for instance, tells us that the women who had come to Jerusalem with Jesus for the Passover returned from the tomb and prepared spices and perfumes before the commencement of the Sabbath, but then "rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment."

An אַמָּה (*ʾa·MAH*, cubit) is an ancient unit of length based on the length of the forearm from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger, about eighteen inches. Noah's ark was three hundred אַמּוֹת (*ʾa·MOT*, cubits) long, fifty wide and thirty high (Gen. 6:15). תְּחוּם שַׁבָּת (*te·ḤUM sha·BAT*, boundary of Sabbath), "a Sabbath day's journey," is the distance from one's town or village that one is permitted to walk on the Sabbath without violating the Fourth Commandment. This distance was defined by the sages even before the time of Jesus to be two thousand cubits, about 1000 meters or six tenths of a mile. Their reasoning was based on several Scriptural passages: Exodus 16:29; Numbers 35:5; Joshua 3:4. Consequently, in Acts 1:12 we learn that the Mount of Olives was a Sabbath day's walk from Jerusalem. **JP**

Transliteration Key

Hebrew & Aramaic

Consonants

א — ʾ (silent)
ב — b
בּ — v
ג — g
ד — d
ה — h (or silent)
ו — v
ז — z
ח — ḥ (voiceless guttural)
ט — t
י — y (or silent)
כ — k
כּ ך* — ḵ (like ch in the Scottish *loch*)
ל — l
מ ם* — m
נ ן* — n
ס — s
ע — ʿ (voiced guttural)
פ — p
פּ ף* — f
צ ץ* — ts (like ts in nets)
ק — k
ר — r
שׁ — sh
שׂ — s
ת — t

*The form of the letter at the end of a word.

Vowels

(The א is used here as a point of reference.)

אַ — a (like a in father; rarely like o in bone)
אָ, אַ — a (like a in father)
אֶ — e (like e in net, or e in hey, or somewhere in between)
אֶ, אֱ — e (like e in net)
אִ, אִי — i (like i in ski)
אֹ, אוֹ, אָ — o (like o in bone)
אֻ, אוּ — u (like u in flu)
אְ — e (silent, or as short as e in happening, or as long as e in net)

Diphthongs

אַי — ai
אָי — oi
אֻי — ui

Greek

Greek words are transliterated according to the Society of Biblical Literature system.

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. Does the language in which God's Word was written in any way influence its authority or historical accuracy?
2. If the original spoken words of Jesus were in Hebrew, and the Gospels written in Greek, might this influence their historical accuracy or their meaning?
3. Which is more important for understanding the Gospels — a knowledge of their original language, or a knowledge of their cultural background? How significant is language in understanding a given culture?
4. Do you or any of your acquaintances know more than one language? How do those languages affect each other in the way you or your acquaintances use words? Do you think differently when using any of the languages which you know?
5. It is not always possible to translate literally from one language to another. Chinese, for example, uses the same word for both "he" and "she," while Hebrew uses separate words for "you" masculine singular, "you" feminine singular, "you" masculine plural and "you" feminine plural. Similarly, Eskimos have several words for snow which allows them to make fine distinctions that would be unintelligible in another language. What effect might such verbal and cultural differences have upon Gospel translations?
6. Most scholars agree that there is a Semitic background to the synoptic Gospels. With that in mind, what difference does it make whether the Semitic language was Hebrew or Aramaic, or whether the biography of Jesus was originally in written or oral form? What relevance does this have to the Synoptic Problem?
7. What impact do you think the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Bar-Kochva letters have had on biblical studies since they were discovered over forty years ago?
8. According to Luke 1:10, the people waiting for the priest outside the sanctuary were praying. Considering the cultural and historical situation at the time, what were they probably praying about? How was Zechariah's vision an answer to those prayers?

Readers' Perspective

(continued from page 2)

perspective a little disappointing. Flowing waters would sound much more inviting, since "still waters" often are stagnant. However, the Hebrew text does not actually say "still waters," but rather מֵי מְנֻחוֹת (*me me·nu·ḤOT*, waters of resting places).

The images are familiar — a shepherd bringing his sheep to an oasis — נְאוֹת דְּשֵׁא (*ne·ʾOT DE·she*), not "green pastures" — where the sheep can rest ("lie down") and drink from the "waters of resting places" which feed the oasis. The consequence of this rest stop is that the sheep's soul or life is restored by the water and the rest.

It appears to us that the first story of Jesus' life, like Psalm 23, was written in Hebrew. The synoptic Gospels today are preserved in Greek in more than 1000 manuscripts. It is important to try to reconstruct from these manuscripts the original Hebrew biography of Jesus and then, after carefully analyzing its text, translate it idiomatically into modern languages.

– David Bivin

International Synoptic Society

The International Synoptic Society supports the Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research by serving as a vehicle through which interested individuals can participate in the School's research.

The Society raises financial support for publication of the Jerusalem School's research, such as the *Jerusalem Synoptic Commentary*; facilitates informal discussion groups focusing on the synoptic Gospels; sponsors student research assistants and other volunteers who work with the Jerusalem School.

Annual membership in the Society is: Regular US$100–$300; Fellow $300–$500; Sponsor $500–$1000; Patron $1000–5000; Lifetime membership $5000 and over. Membership dues can be paid in monthly or quarterly installments, and in any currency.

Members of the Society are entitled to unique privileges such as pre-publication releases of *Commentary* materials and free subscription to JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE. They also receive a beautiful certificate of membership, and three times each year a Hebrew reconstruction and English translation of one of the stories in the conjectured biography of Jesus. Major publications of the Jerusalem School will be inscribed with Society members' names.

Checks should be made payable to "Jerusalem School" and designated "ISS." Members in the United States can receive a tax-deductible receipt by sending their dues via the Jerusalem School's U.S. affiliates: Center for Judaic-Christian Studies, P.O. Box 293040, Dayton, OH 45429; or Centre for the Study of Biblical Research, P.O. Box 5922, Pasadena, CA 91117.

Synoptic Discussion Groups

Individuals who are interested in the continuing research of the Jerusalem School may augment their studies by participating in a synoptic discussion group coordinated by the Synoptic Society.

These groups meet regularly to exchange views on current research presented in JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE. In addition, a group may decide to learn Hebrew together, share study resources or pursue its own Gospel investigations.

Attendance is open to everyone. Since the discussion groups are not formally linked to the International Synoptic Society, membership in the Society is not a requirement for attending or leading a group.

This issue's Suggested Discussion Questions can be found on page 15.

The Jerusalem School

The Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research (מכון ירושלים לחקר האוונגליונים הסינופטיים) is a consortium of Jewish and Christian scholars who are studying Jesus' sayings within the context of the language and culture in which he lived. Their work confirms that Jesus was a Jewish sage who taught in Hebrew and used uniquely rabbinic teaching methods.

The Jerusalem School scholars believe the first narrative of Jesus' life was written in Hebrew, and that it can be successfully recovered from the Greek texts of the synoptic Gospels. The School's central objective is to retrieve the original biography of Jesus. This is an attempt to recover a lost document from the Second Temple period, a Hebrew scroll which, like so much Jewish literature of the period, has been preserved only in Greek.

As a means to its objective, the Jerusalem School is creating a detailed commentary on the synoptic Gospels which will reflect the renewed insight provided by the School's research. Current research of Jerusalem School members and others is presented in the pages of JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE, the School's official voice.

The Jerusalem School was registered in Israel as a non-profit research institute in 1985. Its members are Prof. David Flusser, Dr. Robert L. Lindsey, Prof. Shmuel Safrai, David Bivin, Dr. Randall J. Buth, R. Steven Notley, Dwight A. Pryor, Halvor Ronning, Mirja Ronning, Chana Safrai and Dr. Bradford H. Young.