

THROW OUT THE BABY WITH THE BATHWATER? A COMMENTARY ON THE GREEK NEW TESTAMENT

Written by Rabbi Mordecai Silver. Posted in Articles

It has been suggested by many, especially those who have come out of the Church, that we cannot trust the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. I do not believe that to be true and I will try to explain to you why I feel that way.

It is not the Greek language that causes the problems for us. It is the English translations that cause the problems. The problem in the Greek is when a Hebraic idiom of speech is used and has been literally translated into Greek and then either literally translated into English or because its translation may not be understood clearly by the translator they take the liberty of rendering it by choosing to say what they believe it says. This causes the problem - that the translators do not understand the idiom's of speech so they either render it exactly as it appears in the Greek or try to come up with an acceptable substitute.

The other problem that arises in dealing with the Greek and the Hebrew is the thinking that is behind either language. The Greek way of approaching a situation is not the same as the Hebrew way. In Greek thinking, which is a philosophical or thinking approach, we have the tendency to think things to death before we act on it. We try to explore all our options and want the answer before we make a move. This is how western thought proceeds. The Hebrew way of approaching the same situation is best shown to us through the Children of Israel when Moses told them that Yahweh had chosen them to receive His Torah. The Children of Israel said that they would obey without hearing the covenant. Hebrew is an action language where you don't think it through you step out and do.

In the Paleo-Hebrew as well as the Hebrew Aleph-Bet that we use today it was always understood that the Hebrew was a picture language with each Hebrew letter having a meaning other than just its place in the alphabet. Usually in the construct of the Hebrew

the verb comes before the noun while in the English it comes after the noun. This indicates to us that action takes place before the description.

And that would be at the crux of our problem as many Ephraimites who are seeing the truth of their Hebraic or Israelite heritage strive to try to understand the place of the Torah, Moedim (Appointed Times), the 7th Day Sabbath, etc. in their lives as Believers post Church. When confronted with the possibility that what they have been taught for most of their lives in the Church may be in error Ephraim is trying to work out how this fits into their understanding of God's will for them in these latter days.

But this is just another prophetic promise from the Father as He is calling Ephraim back from their dispersion and calling Judah to awaken from his slumber and open his eyes and behold the Messiah Yeshua.

In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Tanach (Hebrew Scriptures or 'Old Testament'), the translators did their best to bring the Hebrew into the language for the civilization of the time. The translators of the Septuagint were Jewish rabbis and they used the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew that best suited how they saw the meaning. So for Torah, which is a Hebrew word, they chose 'nomos' which means law in the Greek. Now some might say why would they choose law since this word has caused no end of problems to Christians down through the ages and especially in our day and age. You see, to the rabbis, law was not a bad thing. The law had been handed down by God to Moses and from Moses to the nation of Israel. The Torah was the law of God and since it came from God how could that be a bad thing? They saw no problem with how they translated it. In hindsight, had they known what confusion it would cause, maybe they would have chosen another word. You see Torah actually means teachings or instructions and this shows us that the Torah is more than just a set of rules. The Torah is made up of commandments, statutes, judgments, ordinances and precepts that set the standards by which we should be living our lives according to how Yahweh wants us to do so.

But because of a misunderstanding in the Greek word 'nomos' later non-Jewish or non-Hebraic understanding translators and theologians took the Torah to be out of style or maybe I should say out of step with the direction Christianity was headed in. If the translators and the theologians would have understood the writers of the Bible and how they lived and worshipped we might not have the confusion we have today. Then again that is to say that nothing might have changed from what we have today. But there is

move at hand in which the Ruach HaKodesh-the Holy Spirit is calling Ephraim back to its roots and in order to accomplish this many of these returning Ephraimites are coming out of their Church's and looking for congregations, groups or fellowships and even just a couple of people who think the way that they do to help them find their way.

Since Greek is a thinking or a philosophical language we spend way too much time analyzing, dissecting and tearing apart the word of God when we should move forward in living it out as best as we can allowing the Ruach of God to lead us into understanding. As we come to understand how the writers of the Bible and especially the 'New' Testament actually lived and what they believed a whole new world of Bible knowledge opens up to us. This causes us to have to re-evaluate what we have been taught in the Church and we need to have to learn just what the writers of the 'New' Testament meant. This is especially true in approaching the writings of Rav Shaul/the Apostle Paul. Much of the theology and beliefs of the Church are based on what Paul wrote and nit is very clear that the translators did not understand many of the things that Paul was trying to teach us. When he talks about a Torah or Law of the flesh and one of the Spirit many believe that he is coming down on the Torah. This is not true and nothing could be further from the truth. Paul is dealing with, as Yeshua did, how the people were living out their walk. Were they walking out their faith through trying to obtain salvation or righteousness through the letter of the Law or Torah? Or were they living out their walk by putting their faith in Yeshua first and then walking out the Torah in their daily lives?

Paul was dealing with trying to gain one's salvation through the letter of the Torah rather than through faith and the guidance of the Spirit. This would be very clear to the reader if they first knew how Paul lived, how he was raised and how he had been taught. Paul, himself, said it very clearly that he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, from the tribe of Benjamin and a Pharisee from generations of Pharisees. He had been taught by Gamiel in Jerusalem and was as observant a Jew as had ever been. In his own writings we are told that he tried to always get back to Jerusalem for the three pilgrimages festivals of Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot. We are told that he agreed to take a Nazirite vow. We are told that he always went to the Jew first and went to the synagogue wherever he was at, as was his custom. We are told that he had Timothy circumcised. Over and over we are shown his attention to the Torah of his fathers and people - Israel. Does this sound like a man who was against the Torah and told us that it was done away with?

It is our translations of the Bible that are causing us our difficulties. When we go back and look at the Greek word we are usually surprised to find that what the translators have rendered and what was actually being said are two very different things. And even with many English translations if we have an understanding of the culture, customs and traditions of the Jewish people we could come away from reading the Bible with a much clearer understanding once we get rid of our preconceived ideas.

So, am I, saying that the Greek manuscripts are faulty in some way? No! What I am saying is that it is the translators lack of understanding of the people that the Bible is telling us about. Now I am not advocating that one has to become Jewish in order to properly understand the truth of Scripture. What I am saying is get into the Jewish or Hebraic mindset and leave the Greek or westernized thinking behind. You will be wind up being hopelessly lost and we can not have that if Ephraim is to come home. The prodigal son must return and the elder brother, Judah, must learn to accept Ephraim back and help Ephraim reclaim its heritage.

Judah has been given the oracles (Torah) and the scepter. This does not mean that Judah needs to pound Ephraim over the head with it but to lovingly teach Ephraim about their Hebraic roots. Many in Judah still need to see the truth of Yeshua and many in Messianic Judaism need to learn that there is more to God's plan than just Jew and Gentile. Ephraim needs to learn about Judah so that they can share the message of Yeshua with their brothers. Ephraim leave the Greek thinking cap behind and learn about your Israelite heritage. Judah leave your attitude behind and realize that you do not know it all. Neither house does. We need to work together to see the fulfillment of Jew and Greek coming together as one.