**Which Bible?**

2013

### The Source of the Question

More than one denomination has struggled with choosing an “approved” Bible translation: for pulpit reading, for a study Bible, for whatever reason.

This quest may be presented in some sort of position or study paper, all very necessary and well-intended. Such papers are frequently written for the novice so as not to exclude young people or others from the decision process with complicated theological language, equally necessary and well-intended. A paper might even be apropos for beginning seminary students, who may be approaching serious theological studies for the first time.

However, many Christians and theologians will find this kind of presentation tedious. They will know that we are just scratching the surface. A well informed decision requires much more information: more profound and more in quantity.

### What Exactly is the Problem?

The problem is complex and compound; multifaceted and murky. It dominates and ranges across the theological realms of revelation, inspiration, preservation, and canonicity long before it ever arrives at such juggernauts as textual criticism, transmission, and translation. Moreover, all language is a moving target. Language fads, slang, and spelling variation have all been with us, at least since the Tower of Babel.[[1]](#endnote-1)

### Authority. What is the Basis of our Authority?

The basis of our authority is certainly not Scripture. No. No. A thousand times, No. Absolutely not. The only basis of our authority is God Himself. God Himself is the Fountain of Truth. He is the sole source of all Light, Life, and Love. Everything we are and have stems from His relationship with us.

If we attempt to make the Bible the center of authority, we have committed the sin of Bibliolatry or Bible worship. If we attempt to make the Church the center of authority, we have committed another sin of idolatry, though I’m not sure what we would call it. Many people want to define God; that is, to make God in their own image. This is the sin of self-worship, in which each individual makes him or herself into god.

There is only one center of authority, One King of kings, One Lord of lords, One True God. God is the only center of authority. His name is יהוה.[[2]](#endnote-2)

### Autographs. What are Autographs?

Autographs or Autographa are the original first writings of Scripture. Moses gives a detailed description of how the first Autographa came into being and how they were preserved and used.

“Moses took a tent,[[3]](#endnote-3) and pitched it outside of the camp, afar off from the camp, and called it the Tabernacle of the Congregation. Everyone who sought the Lord went out to the Tabernacle of the Congregation, which was outside of the camp. When Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose up, and every man stood at his tent door, and looked after Moses, until he had gone into the tent. And it came to pass, as Moses entered the tent, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood at the door of the tent, and the Lord talked with Moses. All the people saw the cloudy pillar stand at the tent door. All the people rose up and worshipped, every man at his tent door. And the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. And he [Moses] returned again to the camp: but his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the tent.[[4]](#endnote-4)

When Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, when they were finished, Moses commanded the Levites, who bare the Ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying, “Take this book of the law, and put it beside the Ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against you.”[[5]](#endnote-5)

The Decalogue[[6]](#endnote-6) is a distinct artifact preserved within the Ark, underneath the Mercy Seat. The Decalogue itself was engraved in stone by the finger of God Himself.[[7]](#endnote-7) Moses is not now speaking of the Decalogue; rather he speaks of the Torah, the five books he wrote, which contain a full report of the Decalogue, its preservation in the Ark, and a quote of its wording. Now we are looking at the writing, and laying up of the Torah in the Most Holy Place, beside the Ark.

First, logically, in these acts, God reveals Himself to man: in other words, this is God’s act of Revelation. Second, Moses hears and interacts with this revelation in what can only be considered a conversation with God. God’s act of Inspiration enables Moses to enter into all aspects of this conversation. Third, Moses records the minutes of the conversation with God’s permission, supervision, and approval: man’s act of Inscripturation of the Autographa. Fourth, the Levites layup the Autographa in the Most Holy Place, beside the Ark, with God’s permission, supervision, and approval; God’s act of Canonization[[8]](#endnote-8) of the Autographa: Canonization, the Divine Act, consists of the fact that God welcomed the document without destroying either the document or its bearers.

None of the participation of man occurs without the direct supervision in the Presence of God’s Glory. These acts of Revelation, Inspiration, Inscripturation, and Canonization were all carried out in open public, in the presence of millions of eye witnesses.

There is every reason to believe that the same sort of process applies to many of the books of Hebrew Prophecy:[[9]](#endnote-9) namely, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings; possibly even Isaiah, and Jeremiah.

Other books were written as a result of private Inspiration: for example, most of the Minor Prophets[[10]](#endnote-10) and the Hebrew Writings.[[11]](#endnote-11) Since these followed a different process of Inscripturation, they had to be examined and Canonized separately, as the Congregation realized their public value and God approved their Canonization. Before their publicly witnessed Divine recognition such private Inspirations were known as Bath Kol, daughter of voice, daughter of revelation, secondary revelations. The Inspiration of the Holy Ghost was not limited to anointed prophets, but neither was He generally received in the congregation. Exegetical interpretations of Canonized Scripture were also known as Bath Kol.

Books like Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi were never Canonized under Divine approval for reasons we are about to examine. All of these were written after the Fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC.

Ezekiel explains how this process ended.

“Then the glory of the Lord went up from the cherub, and stood over the threshold of the house; and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of the Lord's glory.”[[12]](#endnote-12)

“Then the glory of the Lord departed from the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubim. And the cherubim lifted up their wings, and mounted up from the earth in my sight: when they went out, the wheels also were beside them, and every one stood at the door of the east gate of the Lord's house; and the glory of the God of Israel was above them.[[13]](#endnote-13)

“Then the cherubim lifted up their wings, and the wheels beside them; and the glory of the God of Israel was above them. And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city.[[14]](#endnote-14)

God removed His last protection from Israel, the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC. Now, around 586 BC, God abandons the Temple at Jerusalem, along with Judah, the Southern Kingdom. The city that was protected by Divine intervention is now powerless. Left with only pitifully inferior human armies, the Southern Kingdom falls. The Babylonians, led by Nebuchadnezzar, quickly defeat Judah and sack Jerusalem. Solomon’s Temple, the Ark, Mercy Seat, Urim, Thummim,[[15]](#endnote-15) Decalogue, and Autographa are all destroyed: never to be recovered again.

The time span from Moses (1406 BC[[16]](#endnote-16)) to Ezekiel (586 BC[[17]](#endnote-17)) is roughly 820 years. The Jews knew how to oil documents and seal them in pottery jars. There is no good reason to doubt that the Autographa of Moses were still intact in 586 BC. Their destruction is a monumental loss to the world.

After the return to Jerusalem seventy years later, the Second Temple was built, but the Ark, Mercy Seat, Urim, Thummim, Decalogue, and Autographa were never recovered. Instead, in a purely human act, the Scripture was reconstructed from copies.

The Presence of God’s Glory would not return until around 6-4 BC. Yes, in the interim He did continue the conversation with individuals like Ezra, Nehemiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi; as well as the authors of Chronicles, Esther, and Lamentations. None of these could have been Canonized by God until the event of the return of the Presence of God’s Glory, Jesus of Nazareth around 6-4 BC and the giving of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost in 33 AD. Without the authentication of Jesus the Christ of God and the Holy Ghost we would have no confidence in any Canonization of Scripture whatsoever. Without the work of Jesus the Christ of God and the Holy Ghost everything we have would be nothing more than a futile, useless work of corrupt human flesh.

As it is, because of Jesus the Christ of God and the Holy Ghost, we have excellent documents, supported by the Father’s approval. If we give a little thought, we even know where the Autographa are. What is required for an authentic Autographa? Divine official recognition by the primary author in the presence of many witnesses. The Autographa are located exactly where God always intended them to be, at His side, next to the Mercy Seat, in the Most Holy Place. Consider the location of Jesus throne and know that the Autographa are there.

“For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.”[[18]](#endnote-18)

“I saw in the right hand of Him that sat on the throne a book written front and back, sealed with seven seals. I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the book, and to break its seals?”

“No man in heaven, in earth, or under the earth, was able to open the book, or to look at it. I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, or to look at it. One of the elders said to me, “Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the book, and to break its seven seals.”

“I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth. He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him that sat upon the throne.

“When He had taken the book, the four beasts and twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of incense, which are the prayers of saints. And they sang a new song, saying, “You are worthy to take the book, and to open its seals: for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood from every kindred, tongue, people, and nation; and have made us kings and priests to our God: and we shall reign on the earth.”

“I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, riches, wisdom, strength, honor, glory, and blessing.”

Every creature that is in heaven, on the earth, under the earth, such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying, “Blessing, honor, glory, and power, be to Him Who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever.” The four beasts said, “Amen.” The twenty-four elders fell down and worshipped Him, Who lives for ever and ever.”[[19]](#endnote-19)

“The Temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the Ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.”[[20]](#endnote-20)

Can there remain any doubt about where the Autographa are located, or about Who authenticates and canonizes them?

### Copies. Do we have Valid Copies?

Obviously, Israel and Judah required a method to disseminate the information contained in the Autographa, they were intended for public reading.[[21]](#endnote-21) We know that a second master copy was made for the king.[[22]](#endnote-22) Joshua had a personal copy,[[23]](#endnote-23) and made other copies on the stones at Mount Ebal.[[24]](#endnote-24) Copies were needed for dissemination among the tribes. Later, additional copies were required for Synagogue[[25]](#endnote-25) use.[[26]](#endnote-26)

The Bible provides no detailed information about how such copies were made or how their dissemination took place. Nevertheless, it is not that difficult to fill in the blanks.

Because, the Autographa was kept in the Most Holy place it was necessary for the priests or Levites to have access to the Autographa for verification purposes. This Autographa of the Torah was considered to be so holy that touching it “made the hands unclean.”[[27]](#endnote-27) Consequently, whoever touched the Torah Autographa was compelled to wash his hands both before and after. However, such contact was unavoidable: cleaning and maintenance were required, any damage to the scroll[[28]](#endnote-28) had to be repaired; aged or cracking leaves had to be carefully replaced before so much as a single letter was lost or misinterpreted; it was necessarily consulted to resolve transcription errors; and it was most likely brought out at the three major festivals. Still, there is little reason to doubt that what Moses wrote could very well have remained intact for 820 years.

Most likely a carefully transcribed and thoroughly checked second copy was made to simplify this process and to minimize the handling of an Autograph. Now we see that among the major functions of the Tabernacle and later of Solomon’s Temple was an active library, scribal work place, and burial ground for old unusable Scriptures. Such functions were necessarily located nearby or partially within the Tabernacle or Temple itself. Now we understand why the scribes are so prominent in the New Testament. All research, copying, and verification had to be done manually, and this was certainly a monumental task. Until 586 BC these activities were all conducted under the ever-watchful eye of יהוה Himself. If stumbling blocks were encountered, the high priest consulted יהוה in prayer and He answered with Ephod, Breastplate, Urim, and Thummim.[[29]](#endnote-29)

After the return to Jerusalem seventy years later, the Second Temple was built, but the Ark, Mercy Seat, Urim, Thummim, Decalogue, and Autographa were never recovered. Instead, in a purely human act, the Scripture was recovered from the secondary copies, which were not all destroyed by the Babylonians.

Since the first coming of Christ and because of the work of the Holy Ghost[[30]](#endnote-30) we are confident that we have excellent copies of the Autographa. This does not mean that the path is not strewn with boulders.

### Custody. Who has Custody of Scripture?

With whom does the Holy Spirit communicate? What is His authorized human agency? There can only be one answer, The Church.[[31]](#endnote-31) The Church has absolute and sole custodial authority for the preservation and proclamation of the Bible on earth. No one else, only The Church has received the Apostolic promises of Christ, and the baptism, gift, and leadership of the Holy Ghost. No one else, only The Church has authority to declare what God has made Canonical and what God has not made Canonical. It is ludicrous to suppose that we can find an authentic Bible apart from The Church. All Canonical authority was removed from the Jews in 586 BC and given to The Church in 33 AD. Such authority may be restored to the Jews at some future date as Paul indicates;[[32]](#endnote-32) but this remains to be seen. All works distinct from and outside of The Church are works of the corrupted human flesh that have no validity.

### The Church. Where is the Church?

Unfortunately, The Church is in great disarray. Ever since 1054 AD The Church has been divided into warring factions, and it has become impossible for The Church to speak to any issue with a United Voice. Since the Holy Ghost is given to all Baptized Christians, and not to select individuals, it is imperative for The Church to speak with a United Voice to be sure that the Holy Ghost is being heard and not some radical faction. This is not a matter of rule by the majority or by the powerful. This is a matter of rule by the Unanimous Voice of heaven. The early church strove mightily to make such unity happen and achieved marvelous results. The Reformation, in striving to correct many wrongs, also made the splintering more complicated. As it now stands there are roughly 30,000 bastions of Donatism in the world today. Without The United Church we cannot hope to produce a faithful standard copy or translation.

### Three Churches, Three Bibles, Three Religions

Gordon Clark addressed this problem philosophically, several years ago.[[33]](#endnote-33) If there are three churches with three Bibles and three religions, how can we know which one is the right one, if any. This is the crux of the problem.

In early Christianity the Bible was synonymous with the Old Testament. Evangelism and Worship were both conducted from the Old Testament. The New Testament was being written as The Church grew alongside and together with it. Nowadays, many Christians are completely ignorant of the Old Testament, it is seldom read from the lectern on Sunday anymore, and some folks are being taught to avoid the Old Testament entirely. Some are wrongfully claiming that the Old Testament is about a cruel, harsh God; while the New Testament is about a kindly, merciful God. I’ve even heard, “I don’t like the Law, because the Law is so negative.”

In the face of such appalling ignorance The Church is divided into disassociated floating islands of ignorance. The result is seemingly hopeless. Orthodox Christians embrace the Greek Old Testament, Protestants embrace the Hebrew Old Testament, and Romanists embrace the Latin Old Testament.

You might suppose that this is an easy problem to solve. After all the Old Testament was written in Hebrew, wasn’t it? And the Jews insist that Hebrew and Aramaic are the only languages suitable for Inspired conversation, don’t they? Yet, if we bite into that overly simplistic solution, we would have overlooked at least two very important facts. We would have forgotten that Canonical authority was taken away from the Jews in 585 BC, so they presently have no say in the matter; The Church has the final say. We also would have missed the fact that the current work of the Jews, the Masoretic Text (MT) is seventh century AD and later, at least six-hundred years after the Crucifixion of Christ. Hebrew was never the Lingua Franca of The Church, and both Greek and Latin translations bear testimony to an earlier Hebrew original or originals. So it is thoroughly irrational to endorse the MT as the Christian Bible. It is impossible to understand why Protestants took this turn at the Reformation. The only sensible reason for pursuing the MT is for purposes of evangelism to the Jews. It is impossible that the MT be the faithful representative of the Autographa on earth.

Before we grasp at a second, too-easy, solution and throw the Latin text overboard (just because we don’t want to be caught agreeing with Romanists); let’s pause to think for a minute, before we act. Jerome, the translator of the Vulgate[[34]](#endnote-34) or Vulgata was admittedly the leading linguistic expert of his day. Even linguistic and theological giants such as Augustine appreciated Jerome’s abundant skills. That didn’t stop them from disagreeing with him. It would be foolish of us to disregard Jerome’s insights into the Bible Text around 400 AD. They are certainly superior to the MT for two reasons. One, they are older and hence closer to Christ. Two, they are the work of a Christian brother, and not of outsiders. Jerome’s work certainly holds priority over the MT. We only have one complaint, Jerome used the Hebrew text, rather than the Greek text as the basis for his work. While this was a theologically unwise decision,[[35]](#endnote-35) it has the advantage that it preserves a better and older Hebrew text than the MT. Herein, the providence and wisdom of God has protected us.

The last remaining option is the Greek Old Testament, commonly called the Septuagint,[[36]](#endnote-36) Septuaginta, or LXX, supposedly because it was the work of seventy-two translators. This work preserves an even better and older Hebrew text than the Vulgate. The Septuagint predates Christ by at least one hundred years, and in the case of Torah, by much more, by as many as two hundred years or more. This was the Bible found in most Galilean synagogues. If an uncorrupted Hebrew text is our goal, it is best found by a reverse translation of the LXX.[[37]](#endnote-37) But uncovering an uncorrupted Hebrew text is not our goal.[[38]](#endnote-38)

Our goal is to discover what Bible Jesus and the Apostles held in their hands in the period from the birth of Jesus around 6-4 BC, until the last death of an Apostle, John, possibly as late as 90 AD.

### What Language did Jesus Speak?

The Jewish people were at least trilingual.”

“And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, This Is The King Of The Jews.”[[39]](#endnote-39)

“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.”[[40]](#endnote-40)

We are so accustomed to seeing the Latin, INRI, that we easily overlook the fact that the Greek, ΙΝΒΙ, and the Hebrew, ינמי or possibly ינרי were also written at the head of the cross. The Greek word for king is (B) basileus.[[41]](#endnote-41) The Hebrew word for king is (מ, M) melek; and the word for head is (ר, R) rosh. There can only be one reason for this trilingual inscription. Among the spectators of the Crucifixion were those who spoke Greek, Latin, Hebrew, or some combination of the three.

Hebrew did not actually exist as a language. The Hebrew language was lost as early as 586 BC: perhaps earlier, perhaps a little later. The Hebrew people returned from Babylon speaking Aramaic, and this is the language meant by the word Hebrew. Only a handful of linguistic experts would have any mastery of real Hebrew. Most likely only the Pharisees, Sadducees, and especially their scribes were fluent in Aramaic, and this language may have had some use in Judea. Aramaic was the lingua franca of the temple.

The ranks of Roman soldiers would have been fluent in Latin. Among the Jews it was necessary to know enough Latin to get by in business. However, it is doubtful that very many Jews were fluent in Latin. Latin was the lingua franca of business.

However, Alexander the Great (d 323 BC) brought Greek culture and language to every place he conquered. Before long the Hasmoneans endorsed the Greek language. Towns received Greek names. The shame of Israel was that the teenagers were adopting Greek culture and customs. The Jews translated the Old testament into Greek because the populace needed Bibles they could understand. Greek was the lingua franca of the Roman elite, of Galileans, of common Hebrew people, and the necessary language of evangelism in a Roman world in love with Greek culture and language. The Jewish general and historian, Flavius Josephus[[42]](#endnote-42) wrote his *Jewish Wars* in Greek and possibly bilingually, in Latin.[[43]](#endnote-43)

The best evidence of the language that Jesus and the Apostles spoke, and therefore of the Old Testament they used, is the New Testament itself. All the manuscript evidence points to an exclusively Greek New Testament. All other early manuscripts, even the Aramaic ones, are known to be translations from Greek.

Almost all the evidence points to the conclusion that Jesus and most of the Apostles spoke Greek as their first and primary language. Matthew might be an exception: because he was a Levite, he may have been raised in an Aramaic speaking home in Jerusalem.[[44]](#endnote-44) Because of their culture it would be natural that their primary speech was salted with loan words from Aramaic and Latin. The presence of such loan words proves nothing; just as my occasional German or Swedish word does not show that my first language is anything other than American English.

Is there any evidence that Jesus spoke Aramaic as His first language? Yes there is the presence of the Aramaic loan words. However, if Aramaic was Jesus’ first language, why don’t the lone words ever dominate His speech? There are never any extended Aramaic quotations as might be expected. There are no surviving Aramaic documents from Jesus. This is very surprising when we consider that His mother, Mary treasured everything about Him. Surely, had Jesus spoken or written in Aramaic, Mary would have kept that information; and The Church, out of respect for her would have preserved it. As it is, there is nothing but the occasional loan word, and even these are scarce. We are not convinced by this argument from silence.

### Was there ever an Aramaic New Testament?

Yes, there is an Aramaic New Testament, or fragments of one: but, it is not an original; rather, it is a translation from Greek.

There is one piece of evidence that supports the idea of one, and only one original Aramaic book in the New Testament, the book of Matthew. This supposed evidence comes from Papias (d. 155 AD),[[45]](#endnote-45) who is supposed to have claimed that Mathew first wrote his Gospel in Aramaic. Let’s take a good hard look at this evidence.

* The writings of Papias have not survived; hence, there is only second hand evidence, possibly even hearsay evidence.
* Everything we know about Papias comes from the writings of Irenaeus (d. 202 AD) and Eusebius (d. 339/340 AD).
* Eusebius did not hold Papias in high regard as a wise person.
* Papias’ reported words are subject to a different interpretation.

Perhaps the following quote from Eusebius will disclose the difficulty with the Theorem of Papias.

“ ‘And this the Presbyter used to say [this is in the plural implying John the Elder would employ this argument multiple times in defense of Mark’s Gospel]: “Mark, being the recorder of Peter, wrote accurately but not in order whatever he [Peter] remembered of the things either said or done by the Lord; for he [Mark] had neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but later, as I said, Peter, who used to make teachings according to the cheias, [a special kind of anecdote] but not making as it were a systematic composition of the Lord’s sayings; so that Mark did not err at all when he wrote certain things just as he had recalled [them]. For he had but one intention, not to leave out anything he had heard, nor to falsify anything in them”. This is what was related by Papias about Mark. But about Matthew’s this was said: “For Matthew composed the logia [sayings] in Hebrew style; but each recorded them as he was able” ’ [author incomplete]. This last part is translated into English as every one interpreted them as he was able by Dr. Arthur C. McGiffert and Dr. Ernest C. Richardson.”[[46]](#endnote-46)

And this following discussion should clarify it further.

“Citing this text, many argue that Papias claimed that Matthew was written in the Hebrew language, (as it is often translated in English). This claim of the Semitic origins (Aramaic primacy or Hebrew primacy)[[47]](#endnote-47) of the New testament writings is also testified to by other Church Fathers including Ireneus, Origen, Eusebius, Pantaeneus, Epiphanius, Jerome, Isho’dad, as well as, Clement of Alexandria.[[48]](#endnote-48) Some would argue, however, that Papias’ comment in Greek, (Ματθαῖος μέν οὖν Ἑβραίδι διαλέκτῳ τά λόγια, “Hebrew dialect”) is a common construction in Greek and is seen in many different sources and contexts and seems to consistently refer to a style or subset of a language being spoken; and, this is distinguished from the general Greek term for language or tongue, “γλῶσσα”. Papias' statement seems to signify a style of language or dialect being used by the “Hebrews”, (or in other words, the style or subset of a language being used by the Hebrew race). In the historical context, the “dialect of the Hebrews”, (Ἑβραίδι διαλέκτῳ), was most probably a reference to the Hebrew dialect of Aramaic.[[49]](#endnote-49) Due to the testimony of so many other sources, including Papias’ contemporaries, this argument seem likely to overlook the other sources for this same claim.[[50]](#endnote-50) In fact all of the previously listed Church Fathers are quoted in their own writings as testifying to the Semitic origins of, at the very least, the Gospel of Matthew. Other scholars on the language of the New Testament have also argued that at least portions of the New Testament writings were originally penned in a Semitic tongue.[[51]](#endnote-51) [[52]](#endnote-52)

Here is our final objection to the Theorem of Papias: namely, that Matthew wrote his Gospel originally in Greek, not in Aramaic as the Theorem of Papias proposes. Citing a litany of supposed subsequent authorities (“Ireneus, Origen, Eusebius, Pantaeneus, Epiphanius, Jerome, Isho'dad, as well as, Clement of Alexandria”) on this subject profits nothing for this argument, because all of them, rest on the supposed reported statement of Papias alone. Consequently, there are not eight threads of evidence, but only eight opinions based on one thread of evidence. The Theorem of Papias stands alone and naked on the basis of the authority of Eusebius only. Papias’ supposed words are subject to interpretation and may well mean that Matthew wrote originally in the Greek language, in that Greek dialect in common use among the Hebrew people.[[53]](#endnote-53) On the other hand, they could also mean that Matthew wrote in Aramaic. The evidence found in Papias’ quote is unclear. Hence, Papias provides no firm evidence that even one book of the New Testament, Matthew, has an Aramaic original.

There is no surviving original Aramaic document, or copy of such a document. This means that there would be no extant Autographa of Matthew. It also means that the very Apostles who were charged with the task of creating and disseminating the New Testament Autographa failed in their duty. Moreover, The Church failed in its charge to preserve and pass on this sacred document, so we wouldn’t even have a reliable copy of the Autographa of Matthew. Such a line of reasoning is absurd.

The Church stands, and must continue to stand on evidence. There is no surviving document, no text evidence whatsoever; and the supposed evidence from Papias is so weak as to lack merit. We steadfastly refuse to accept the thoughtless theorems of modern scholars, theorems that stand only on their opinions. If there is an Aramaic original for Matthew, produce the document, or at least the fragmentary evidence that it once existed. Do not continue to confront us with arguments from silence and unsupported opinions.

### How did Jesus use the Old Testament?

We have taken the position and attempted to thoroughly support the idea that the New Testament was first written exclusively in Greek, and then translated into other languages. We also have taken the position and attempted to thoroughly support the idea that the first language of Jesus, the Apostles, and Galileans in general was Greek.[[54]](#endnote-54) Now we make the claim that all of the Old Testament quotes found in the New Testament are from the Greek Old Testament, most commonly called LXX. We will let this stand without further support. The reader is free to examine each and every quote. Suffice it to say, that we believe this opinion stands uncontested in the field of New Testament studies.

The ramifications of the idea of a prevailing Greek Old Testament in the hands of Jesus and the Apostles are far reaching and cosmic.

Jesus is the acclaimed Glory of God, the one who spoke with Moses, and the primary author of both Old and New Testaments. He is at once, author, interpreter, fulfillment, and canonical authority pertaining to all that is written, and all that The Church believes.

The Jewish claim that Hebrew and Aramaic are the only possible inspired languages is completely overturned. The Glory of God has spoken, just as He once spoke to Moses.

The rabbinic concepts of Christology and theology, stated so clearly in the LXX, were understood by the Jews at least one hundred years before the Glory of Christ appeared. This means that, when Christ appeared, they not only rejected Him, they also rejected their own theology: that very theology which He claimed and proclaimed as His own.

This is not to draw the conclusion that there is no work of textual criticism necessary concerning the Greek Old Testament. However, such textual criticism cannot be entrusted to voices outside of The Church, or to false voices within The Church that have proved themselves to be the enemies of and traitors to Christ. The Greek Old Testament in our hands must be the best possible copy of the Greek Old Testament in Jesus’ hands. It must be that passed down within The Church. It may not be that passed down outside of The Church. It makes no sense at all to entrust this work to non-Christians or false Christians.

### What is the Text of the New Testament?

A great number of theories have been forwarded for both testaments: the Documentary Hypothesis (JEDP) for the Old, and the Quelle Source (Q) for the New. We cast these theories aside for identical reasons. They must die for lack of evidence. If evidence for JEDP and Q exists, produce it. Stop confronting us with arguments from silence and unsupported opinions.

There is another danger here, it involves problems with New Testament textual criticism. The controversy includes the work of Hort (d. 1892) and Westcott (d. 1901)[[55]](#endnote-55) or Nestle (d. 1913) and Aland (d. 1994).[[56]](#endnote-56) For the opposing view consult the work of Maurice A. Robinson, Wilbur Pickering, Arthur L. Farstad (d. 1998),[[57]](#endnote-57) and Zane C. Hodges (d. 2008).[[58]](#endnote-58) These latter supported the Majority Text,[[59]](#endnote-59) one approach to the Textus Receptus.[[60]](#endnote-60) The Textus Receptus is an attempt to identify that which is passed down within The Church; while the works of Hort, Westcott, Nestle, Aland, et al have no such goal in view.

The works of Hort, Westcott, Nestle, Aland, et al suppose that a modern scholar, with a first language of English or German is better qualified to judge difficult matters of Greek idiom and hand written text than an ancient student, with a first language of Greek. Ancient students, hot on the trail of the problem, have labored diligently since 313 AD or even before, at which time Constantine[[61]](#endnote-61) legalized Christianity with the Edict of Milan.[[62]](#endnote-62) It is preposterous to believe that Hort, Westcott, Nestle, Aland, et al could fetch a document from a wastebasket, claim it to be the text, with greater wisdom than the ancient Greeks. Not only are their skills inferior to the Greeks; they follow a cold trail, rather than a hot one; and the documents they applaud so vigorously were found in the wastebasket, precisely because they were inferior to begin with. It is foolish to discard the wise custodianship of The Church for a handful of western scholars with inferior credentials and training.

Be that as it may, the usual approach of modern conservative Christian scholars is to ignore and trivialize this evidence and continue on their self-made destructive path.

### Conclusions

We cannot support any document either Old or New Testament as a legitimate contender for a first copy of the Autographa that is not Greek and is not handed down within The Church. Any other claimant is false. This is not a claim that we have such a perfect first copy of the Autographa in our hands, but it is certainly the goal which we must seek.[[63]](#endnote-63)

We highly value translations, because the Scriptures must be read in the language of the people; but all such translations must be based on a legitimate first copy of the Autographa, or at least on a faithfully constructed archetype, not on the opinions of various scholars.

Which American English translation should be selected as the standard for conservative, Bible believing churches: the ESV or the next generation NIV? Neither one. Both are based on the works of Hort, Westcott, Nestle, Aland, et al. Both are based on the MT. Both must be rejected as inferior.

There has not been a standard English language translation since the King James version fell into disfavor and disuse. It was also flawed, being based on the MT. However, it had the advantage of being in universal acceptance among English speaking people everywhere. With the fragmentation that exists in The Church today it is unlikely that an acceptable English standard translation is possible. This does not mean that we shouldn’t attempt such a version. Nevertheless, to do this honestly, we shall have to start from scratch, because all the current attempts are flawed at the basic presuppositional level.

[[64]](#endnote-64)

1. Genesis 11:1-9 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Exodus 3:13-15 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. This is not the First Tabernacle. Instructions for building the First Tabernacle had not yet been given. This was a temporary tent which Moses used for his conversations with God. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Exodus 33:7-11 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Deuteronomy 31:24-26 [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Exodus 20:1-17 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Exodus 24:12; 31:18; 34:1, 4; Deuteronomy 4:13; 5:22; 9:9-11; 10:1-5 [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. What is known as Canonization today generally describes an inferior act of the human flesh. There is no evidence of the Presence of God’s Glory whatsoever in these fleshly acts.

Consequently, the Council of Jamnia and the work of the Masoretes must be seen as works of flesh. Today, we believe that the Council of Jamnia never happened; it was a fable, a fabrication. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. The Nevi’im [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Sometimes known as the Twelve [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. The Ketuvim [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Ezekiel 10:4 [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Ezekiel 10:18-19 [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Ezekiel 11:22-23 [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Nehemiah 7:65 – the priest could not consult with Urim and Thummim because they did not have them. There is no evidence that they were ever recovered. Jesus alone restores the ability and authority to talk with the Father and receive direct answers. The coming of the Holy Ghost extends this ability and authority to The Church. Such authority has never been removed from The Church, but the ability appears to have been lost: it was frittered away, mostly by disuse and fragmentation. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. The approximate date for Moses’ confrontation with Pharaoh. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. The approximate date for the first sack of Jerusalem. There were three such sackings over a period of about seventeen years. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Hebrews 9:24 [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Revelation 5 [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Revelation 11:19 [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Deuteronomy 31:11; Joshua 8:34-35; Nehemiah 9:3 [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Deuteronomy 17:18-20 [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Joshua 1:8 [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Joshua 8:30-32 [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. We now recognize the necessity for the early development of the Synagogue. The Seventy or Seventy-two assisting elders of Moses were tasked with teaching Torah to roughly two-million people; such an enormous task was impossible to accomplish without considerable organization: at first in tents, with regular times of assembly; later in buildings. Thus, the institution of the Synagogue was, necessarily, already underway while Israel was still on the march. Buildings were employed during the settlement process. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Luke 4:16-21 [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Beckwith, Roger T., *Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church* (Wipf and Stock, Eugene, OR: 2008) 528 pages: has a fascinating discussion of this and many other related issues. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. We have now come to believe the greater probability that the Mosaic Autographa were in the form of clay tablets written in Akkadian Cuneiform. The scribes may very well have made their copies on less durable, but lighter weight, papyrus and/or parchment scrolls. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Joshua 7; 9:14, especially here, where it is clear that they failed because they did not pray. See also the Psalms. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. John 16:13 – what is promised is the Holy Ghost’s continuous ongoing guidance of The Church. There is no promise that the truth would fall from the sky in a single complete package. Rather, as with the Old Testament Church, truth was discovered one-day-at-a-time by faithfully and sincerely walking with the Father, by the blood of the Son, in the encouragement and guidance of the Holy Ghost. The path is always narrow, it will never be easy. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. The Church is carefully defined in Hebrews 12:18-29. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Romans 11:16-32 [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gordon\_Clark [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Vulgate is the name of the dominant Latin version. Its translation was made by Jerome: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerome. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. According to Augustine, who wrote personal letters to Jerome begging him not to follow this course of action. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Septuagint means seventy and derives its name from rounding the notion of seventy-two downward. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which have no provenance, this was the only possible course of action. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. The total problem of Old Testament text criticism is much larger than this. There are many other ancient versions that precede the MT; unraveling all of those presently known would be a much greater task. We suffice to show Vulgata and Septuaginta as our primary examples of the task. In any case, Septuaginta manuscripts are the end of the line: Septuaginta is the Scripture Canonized by Christ and the Apostles.

The Papias objection can be raised that Matthew ostensibly wrote in Aramaic. This is a very unlikely path to follow. Papias was not widely received as the most brilliant student among the Fathers. Papias is not known to us directly. Reports of Papias’ words may simply mean that Matthew wrote in an “Arimaicized” dialect of Greek: the very dialect of Greek commonly spoken in Israel circa 33 AD. If Matthew actually wrote in Aramaic, we have lost the document; we have no other record of its existence: it is unthinkable that the Church lost anything so precious. The whole idea is preposterous: really, the Church lost the Aramaic document while retaining first century copies of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and more… all in Greek? [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Luke 23:38 [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. John 19:19-20 [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Pronounced vasileus [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. A Latin name. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. The theory that Josephus wrote originally in Aramaic is without merit. We believe in evidence. There is no evidence that such a document ever existed. Moreover, Josephus’ primary target audience was elite Romans, who would prefer Greek. A Latin parallel version would be a condescension to the Roman populace. Φλαβίου Ἰωσήπου ἱστορία Ἰουδαϊκοῦ πολέμου πρὸς Ῥωμαίους βιβλία, *Phlabiou Iōsēpou historia Ioudaikou polemou pros Rōmaious biblia*): http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\_Wars\_of\_the\_Jews. Without either evidence or motive it is difficult to accept a theory just because scholars say so. It is decisive to such theories that no Aramaic document survives, not even minor fragments. This is most unusual in light of Josephus’ extreme prominence. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Matthew 10:2-4 [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Papias\_of\_Hierapolis [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Papias\_of\_Hierapolis [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. There is no debate between Aramaic and Hebrew primacy: these are identical. When the Jews returned from Babylon circa 516 BC they spoke Aramaic. When the Old Testament was reconstructed from extant copies it was written in Aramaic characters. The Old Hebrew language was so far lost to the populace that Scripture reading by specialized experts in Hebrew, was accompanied by hours of interpretation or translation. See Nehemiah 8:8 [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. Up to this point the discussion explains the Aramaic primacy argument. The word, however, which follows in the next phrase, introduces the bone-of-contention, the Greek primacy argument. At this point the author or editors commit an obvious blunder. Instead of explaining the Greek primacy argument, they beg the question, they assume the conclusion in favor of Aramaic primacy, and insert the words Aramaic or Hebrew where the word Greek should be. The whole bone-of-contention is this: if Papias is taken as an unimpeachable source and emphasis is placed on Papias’ use of the word Ἑβραίδι; then the absolute conclusion is reached, Matthew undoubtedly wrote his Gospel in the Aramaic language. However, Papias is not an unimpeachable source. Moreover emphasis may be placed on Papias’ use of the word διαλέκτῳ; now the conclusion is uncertain, because διαλέκτῳ may imply a Hebrew dialect of Greek. The interpretation “a Hebrew dialect of Greek” assumes the conclusion and trivialized the discussion. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. Here is the assumed, but undemonstrated conclusion. The author or editors blunder removes one lemma of the discussion so that both sides can no longer be weighed. The reader may chose whichever side he wishes, but at least he should be given a real choice from which to choose. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. There is only one source here. The whole chain depends solely on the witness of Papias. All the others took their opinions from Papias; hence, there is only one source. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. Obviously, they are arguing on the basis of their own opinions, not on the basis of facts. The only know extant evidence is the quote of Papias, and the complete absence of any trace of a precursor document written in Aramaic. The word Semitic embraces Aramaic, Old Hebrew, and a number of other cognate languages that are thought to derive from a common source. Once again, the word Semitic assumes the conclusion without demonstrating it. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Papias\_of\_Hierapolis [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. Not the Hebrew dialect of Aramaic, which would be so obvious as to be nearly a tautology. This makes no sense. Rather, the Hebrew dialect of Greek. It is commonly known that alien peoples have trouble forming the correct vocalizations of words, even when they grow up with such vocalizations as a first language. Vocalization is learned as a small child by imitating the vocal patterns of adults, primarily the mother. These patterns are fully formed at a very early age. Once formed they are only changed with great difficulty. It simply becomes impossible: for example, for an American to learn to pronounce Greek γ or Hebrew ק correctly. The muscle development is gone. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. The strongest support for this idea comes from the fact that we have an exclusively Greek New Testament, rather than an Aramaic one or a mixed Aramaic, Greek, or even Latin one. For example, why weren’t the epistles to the diaspora of the Jews written in Aramaic, if Aramaic had any claim to be the Jew’s first language? [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\_New\_Testament\_in\_the\_Original\_Greek [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Novum\_Testamentum\_Graece [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. http://www.faithalone.org/journal/1998ii/Carmical.html [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/dallasmorningnews/obituary.aspx?page=lifestory&pid=120756251#fb LoggedOut [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Byzantine\_text-type [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Textus\_Receptus [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
61. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constantine\_the\_Great [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
62. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edict\_of\_Milan [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
63. The primary document reconstructed by means of text criticism and/or handed down within the Church is called an archetype; which recognizes the vast difference between what we have lost, the Autographa, and what we have found, the archetype: we still have a long, long way to travel in the quest for any Autographa; much more evidence must be found. [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
64. If you have been blessed or helped by any of these meditations, please repost, share, or use any of them as you wish. No rights are reserved. They are designed and intended for your free participation. They were freely received, and are freely given. No other permission is required for their use. [↑](#endnote-ref-64)