



Quote

Adult Education

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1 Jo 3:14-24

Aramaic Idiom in the NT



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Tyndale, the great English translator who contributed greatly (anonymously) to the King James NT, understood that Aramaic lay behind the NT writings, - he says so in the preface to his Tyndale NT published in Europe in the 16th c. He recognized the sentence structure as decidedly un-Greek. Some people call this strange Greek "Koine", because it was very unlike the classical Greek they were used to, but is better termed *Aramaic Translation Greek*. as it is a word for word translation of the Aramaic into Greek.

This is commentary - don't take it as Gospel. It is here to encourage meditation and study. Use your gift of discernment, to find the truth.



Aramaic Idiom in the NT

Many people are surprised to find that at least some of the New Testament writings were originally in Aramaic, and that we are sure that the Gospel of Matthew was written first in Aramaic, and that most of the writings attributed to Paul were in Aramaic.

Matthew 5:29) *And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out ...*

This is a Greek/English literal translation of an Aramaic idiom which we now (since the 20th c.) know had a meaning of:

"If you have a habit of envying, cut it out, stop it."

(Matthew 5:30) *And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, ... this meant*

"stop stealing"

(Matthew 7:6) *Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.*

This meant "wise sayings before fools."

(Matthew 8:21) *And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.*

meant "take care of my father until he dies."

(Matthew 9:16) *No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse.*

meant "new teaching mixed with the old teaching."

How do we know this? The NT is full of Aramaic idiom, which would be completely mystifying to a Greek reader, so the intended audience must have been Aramaic speaking Judeans, and other Semitic tribes. Josephus, the Jewish historian who wrote the history of the Jews wrote entirely in Aramaic (c. AD 100). He was writing for the Romans. Aramaic was a very popular language, spoken all over Asia, since 800 B.C

Paul mentions when he writes in Greek.

(Matthew 10:34) *Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.*

meant: "to bring division."

And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.

meant: "willing to die, risk your life."

(Matthew 11:11) *Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*

meant: "a human being with limitations, weaknesses ."

(Matthew 11:17) *And saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented.*

meant: "we have tried to inform, to induce you to come out."

(1 Corinthians 3:2) *I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.*

meant: "trained with simple teachings."

(1 Corinthians 13:1) *Though I speak with the tongues ... of angels,*

meant: "speech without deception; truthful."

(2 Corinthians 6:11) *O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you,*

meant: "we have told you everything and we have hidden nothing."



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1 Jo 3:14-24

Additional Comments

(Matthew 10:14) *And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, **shake off the dust of your feet.***

meant “Have nothing to do with them: leave them alone.”

(Matthew 10:16) *Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore **wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.***

meant: “Avoid trouble, and be trustful, pure in heart.

Not until the first World War, did the West discover Aramaic speaking Christians, who still read the Bible in Aramaic. They were living in the mountains of Iran. The Universities of Oxford and Cambridge sent two teams of scholars to these villages to teach the people English. Finally it was possible to produce an Aramaic/English lexicon, and for these people to explain their idiom. The first English translation of the Aramaic Bible was completed in 1933.

In the preface to the Lamsa translation of this text, is this statement

“.. the Church of the East received the scriptures from the hands of the blessed Apostles themselves in the Aramaic original, ... the text ... has come down from the Biblical times without any change or revision” signed Mar Eshai Shimun, by Grace, Catholicos Patriarch of the East.

Now it has been verified by others that all extant mss. of the Aramaic text (the Peshitta), agree word for word, and it is assumed that what the Church of the East has today, represents faithfully the Gospels as they were written.

Now there is some disagreement about this. The Western theologians suggest that the text was translated into Aramaic from the Greek, though there is no Greek mss. that matches the Aramaic word for word, and what Greek mss. have been found, disagree with one another, sometimes quite violently.

Aramaic had been the lingua franca for more than 800 years throughout the lands where the tribes of Israel had settled (what is today Israel, Palestine, Iran, Iraq etc.). It was not until their conversion to Islam in c. AD 700, that these territories dropped Aramaic and adopted Arabic (a sister language). Only a few small land areas escaped conversion to Islam, and these people lived in the mountains of what is today, part of Iran, Iraq and Turkey, and were so isolated from the world, that as far as the West was concerned, Aramaic vanished as a spoken language c. 700 AD.

Additional Comments

When you read the Peshitta in English it is surprisingly like the King James translation of the Received Text, which was based on Lucian’s translation of the original Aramaic MSS in c. A.D. 300.

Tyndale was right to maintain a word for word equivalency in his translation, so as to preserve the underlying Aramaic, even though he could not have had any first hand knowledge of Aramaic, for since 1933 we have the Aramaic Bible, and theologians now understand what the strange expressions in our Bible meant to the 1st. c. Christians.

You can see that to establish a point of doctrine from solely one statement without understanding the meaning of the underlying language, can be a disaster theologically.

It is always best to check other passages with the same expression to see the context and compare.

The Holy Bible from the Aramaic Peshitta is now available so you can read the passage from this translation if you suspect that the phrase is idiomatic.

Peshitta means “popular translation” .

Do not confuse with Peshitto, which are MSS not the same as the Peshitta of the Syrian Church..

Idioms in the Bible Explained

Lamsa, George M.

Harper Collins

0-06-064927-5

Holy Bible from the Ancient Eastern Texts

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0-06-064923-2