

Ask the Rabbi:

How can we trust the four accounts of the life of Yahshua, since they are based upon oral traditions and not written accounts, and they may be corrupted?

Rabbi Nydle's Answer:

This is an unfounded objection that many of the anti-missionaries use to discredit the *Brit Chadasha*. The Dead Sea Scrolls consist of over 4,000 fragments of 500 scrolls in Hebrew and Aramaic. The time period of the Scrolls is from 250 B.C.E. to 70 C.E. There are also other documents of the era that prove the language of the day in Yisrael was Hebrew and Aramaic.

- “In light of the discovery of the Scrolls, it has been definitely established that Greek influence on early Christianity was but weak, for most the concepts of the New Testament previously believed to stem from pagan thought are now found to originate with a Jewish Sect and in a most definitely Jewish context.” **David Flusser, The Judean Desert Scrolls and the Beginning of Christianity, pg.1**
- “Hebrew was both the daily language and the language of study. The Gospel of Mark contains a few Aramaic words, and this is what misled scholars [to think Y’shua¹ spoke Aramaic]...it is accepted that most people were fluent in Hebrew... There is thus no ground for assuming that Y’shua did not speak Hebrew...” **David Flusser, Jewish Sources of Early Christianity, pg11**

From the work by Carmignac, Tresmontant, and others we know that the Gospels were originally written in the Semitic tongue or based upon documents written in a Semitic tongue, which proves these records were written at an early date in Aramaic or Hebrew.² It is impossible to properly understand the teachings of the Master from the Greek perspective and language.

- “The Epistles were translated into Greek for the use of converts who spoke Greek. Later they were translated into Latin and other tongues.” **George Lamsa, Introduction, Holy Bible, pg.xii**
- “We know, that the language of the Temple and the Synagogue was Hebrew, and that the addresses of the Rabbis had to be ‘targumed’ into the vernacular Aramaean - and can we believe that, in a Hebrew service, the Messiah could have risen to address the people in Greek, or that He would have argued with the Pharisees and Scribes in that tongue, especially remembering that its study was actually forbidden by the Rabbis?” **Edersheim, Vol.1, Bk.2, Chapter 2**
- “When we turn to the N.T. we find that there are reasons for suspecting a Hebrew or Aramaic original for the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, John, and the Apocalypse.” **Hugh J. Schonfield; An Old Hebrew Text of Matthew’s Gospel, 1927**
- “...this old Syriac Gospel of Matthew appears at least to be built upon the original Aramaic text which was the work of the Apostle himself.” **William Cureton; Remains of a Very Ancient Recension of the Four Gospels in Syriac; 1858**
- “We come to the conclusion, therefore the Apocalypse as a whole is a translation from the Hebrew or Aramaic.” **R.B.Y. Scott; The Original Language of the Apocalypse, 1928**
- “In regard to Luke, it remains to be said, that of all the Four Gospels it is the one, which gives by far the plainest and most constant evidence of being a translation.” **C. C. Torrey; Our Translated Gospels p.lix**
- “The Nazarenes have the Gospel according to Matthew quite complete in Hebrew, for this Gospel is certainly still preserved among them as it was first written, in Hebrew letters.” **Epiphanius (370 C.E.)**
- “His book [Matthew’s] was in existence in Caesarea of Palestine, and everyone acknowledges that he wrote it with his hands in Hebrew...” **Ishodad Commentary on the Gospels (850 C.E.)**

¹ I have changed the Greek /Latin Name for Y’shua to Hebrew

² I want to thank Dr. James Trimm for his research in the HRV N.T.

- “ He [Shaul-Paul] being a Hebrew wrote in Hebrew, that is his own tongue and most fluently while things which were eloquently written in Hebrew were more eloquently turned into Greek.” **Jerome, Lives of Illustrious Men, Book V**
- “Now, Y’shua, who did not go outside the borders of Palestine, and almost certainly knew no Greek at all, only carried certain conceptions of Judaism to extremes out of which easily arose non-Judaism...” **Dr. Joseph Klausner³, From Jesus to Paul, pg.482**

These quotes are enough proof that the early accounts of Yahshua’s life were written in Hebrew and some by the hands of the Apostles themselves, and the Nazarenes believed they were authentic accounts.

- “Therefore, in my view, a high level of Greek prose, such as that used in Luke, is a bit of a red herring, because even the best Greek in the NT has Semitic patterns beneath the text that testify to its true origins.” **Andrew Gabriel Roth, Signs of the Cross, pg.42**
- “One can thus demonstrate the Hebrew origins of the Gospels by retranslating them into Hebrew...It appears the earliest documents concerning Y’shua were written works, taken down by his disciples after his death. Their language was early Rabbinical Hebrew with strong undercurrents of Biblical Hebrew... [concerning the writings of Rav Shaul] In these books, we can trace the influence of the Greek translation of the bible side by side with the influence of the Hebrew original.” **David Flusser, op.cit.pg.11**
- “Matthew collected the oracles in the Hebrew language, and each interpreted them the best he could.” **Papias (ca.60-130 CE), bishop of Hierapolis**
- “Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect...” **Irenaeus, Adv.Haer.3.1.1**
- “Matthew had first preached to the Hebrews, and when he was on the point of going to others he transmitted in writing in his native language the Gospel according to himself, and thus supplied by writing the lack of his own presence to those from whom he was sent.” **Eusebius,H.E. 3.24.6**

Even the Talmud acknowledges that the Gospels were written down in Hebrew and they contained the Name of YHWH. If they were written in Greek, the substitute Titles would have been used.

- Come and hear: The blank spaces above and below, between the sections, between the columns, at the beginning and at the end of the Scroll, defile one's hands.¹³ — It may be that [when they are] together with the Scroll of the Law they are different.¹⁴ Come and hear: The blank spaces¹⁵ and the Books of the Minim¹⁶ may not be saved from a fire, but they must be burnt in their place, they and the Divine Names occurring in them. Now surely it means the blank portions of a Scroll of the Law? No: the blank spaces in the Books of Minim. Seeing that we may not save the Books of Minim themselves, need their blank spaces be stated? — This is its meaning: And the Books of Minim are like blank spaces. It was stated in the text: The blank spaces and the Books of the Minim, we may not save them from a fire. R. Jose said: On weekdays one must cut out the Divine Names which they contain, hide them, ¹⁷ and burn the rest. R. Tarfon said: May I bury my son if I would not burn them together with their Divine Names if they came to my hand. For even if one pursued me¹⁸ to slay me, or a snake pursued me to bite me, I would enter a heathen Temple [for refuge], but not the houses of these [people], for the latter know (of G-d) yet deny [Him], whereas the former are ignorant and deny [Him], and of them the Writ saith, and behind the doors and the posts hast thou set up thy memorial.¹⁹ R. Ishmael said: [One can reason] a minori: If in order to make peace between man and wife the Torah decreed, Let my Name, written in sanctity, be blotted out in water,²⁰ these, who stir up jealousy, enmity, and wrath between Israel and their Father in Heaven, how much more so;²¹ and of them David said, Do not I hate them, O L-rd, that hate thee? And am I not grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies.²² And just as we may not rescue them from a fire, so may we not rescue them from a collapse [of debris] or from water or from anything that may destroy them. ¹⁵) Jast. s.v. iuhkd translates, the gospels, though observing that here it is understood as blanks. V. Herford, R.T., ‘Christianity in the Talmud’, p. 155 n. **Notes** : (16) Sectarrians. The term denotes various kinds of Jewish sectarians, such as the Sadducees, Samaritans, Judeo-Christians, etc., according to the date of the passage in which the term is used. The reference here is probably to the last-named. V. J.E., art. Min; Bacher in REJ. XXXVIII, 38. Rashi translates: Hebrew Bibles written by men in the service of idolatry.(17) v. p. 429, n. 5 **Shabbat 116a**

³ Professor of Modern Hebrew Language & Literature in the Hebrew University, Jerusalem

Also, Jewish writings of the Middle Ages allude to or quote a Hebrew Matthew of the Shem-Tob type. These writings include the Talmud (as above), the *Book of Nester*, the *Tol'doth Yeshu*, the *Milhamot HaShem*, and *Sepher Yosef Hamekane*.⁴

A Literate Culture

Also, the gospel accounts were written in a culture that kept recorded accounts in writing. The Yisraelites were well educated in reading and writing and were a very literate culture. We have written accounts from that particular time period of debts and transactions. They even had over 38 different legal documents that were prepared and some even had "fill in the blank" spaces. Government notices were posted for all to read, and some cities even had a letter service of some kind.

- "Writing was prevalent from the earliest days. The Israelites made more extensive use of the instrument of writing than the neighboring nations, such as the Ammonites, Moabites, and other kindred people around them." **George Lamsa, Introduction, Holy Bible pg.ix**
- For the Jerusalemites had friends and correspondents in the most distant parts of the world, and letters were carried by special messengers, in a kind of post-bag. Nay, there seem to have been some sort of receiving-offices in towns, and even something resembling our parcel-post. And, strange as it may sound, even a species of newspapers, or broadsheets, appears to have been circulating (mikhtabin), not allowed, however, on the Sabbath, unless they treated of public affairs. **Edershiem, Vol.1,Bk.2,Chap.2 pg.131**
- A few archeological notices may help the interpretation of details. From the context it seems more likely, that the 'bonds,' or rather 'writings,' of these debtors were written acknowledgments of debt, than, as some have supposed that they were, leases of farms. **Edershiem, Vol.4,Bk.4,Chapter 18**

Judea was surrounded by many other cultures, so it would be natural for residents to be multi-lingual and able to speak Greek, Latin, and Aramaic, besides Hebrew. In such a diverse culture, it would be very unusual for a religious community to maintain only an oral tradition, without any writings. The Essenes had many texts of their own besides the Scriptures, and Philo mentions the Therapeutae of Egypt, who had their own scrolls of teachings. The Zohar, written by Rabbi Yochanan bar Yochai was originally written in Aramaic. The Kaddish, which dates from the Second Temple Period, is also written and recited in Aramaic.

From Oral Tradition to Written Torah

Yahshua was a rabbi with *talmidim*. His disciples believed Him to be the *Moshiach*. It seems very unlikely that they would not have memorized His words and then copied down His words, His teachings, and His actions onto paper for future generations to read. They would have wanted to share them with other Believers.

- ²⁶"But the Melitz Yosher (Praklit, Advocate, Counsellor, Helper in Court), the Ruach Hakodesh--which HaAv will send b'Shem of Me--He will teach you all things and will remind you of all things which I told you. **Yochanan 14:26**
- "This is also true of the Gospels. They were written a few years after the resurrection and some of the portions written by Matthew while Y'shua was preaching. **THEY WERE NOT HANDED DOWN ORALLY AND THEN WRITTEN AFTER THE PAULINE EPISTLES, AS SOME WESTERN SCHOLARS SAY; THEY WERE WRITTEN MANY YEARS BEFORE THOSE EPISTLES.** Other contemporary Jewish literature was produced at the same time the Gospels were in circulation. The Gospels, as well as the Epistles, were written in Aramaic, the language of the Jewish people, both in Palestine and in the Greco-Roman Empire. Greek was NEVER the language of Palestine. Josephus' book on the Jewish Wars was written in Aramaic." **George Lamsa, Introduction, Holy Bible, pg.ix**

This is exactly what the Chabad Lubavitchers did with the teachings of their late Rebbe. Several of his disciples had excellent recollection of the words he spoke. His students would then transpose the teachings that they had memorized onto paper after the Shabbat.

⁴ Hebrew Gospel of Matthew by George Howard pg.234

They did not wait for decades to record the words of their Rebbe whom many thought was the messiah. Is not it highly probable then that the talmidim of a Rabbi/Teacher from the Second Temple period did the same with the teachings of their Rebbe Who was the *Moshiach*?

According to early tradition, Shimon Kepha, a Galilean fisherman, visited several Nazarene communities to relate what he could recall of the teachings and life of Yahshua. Being a Galilean; he probably spoke Aramaic and required an interpreter. The young man, Yochanan Markus of Yerushalayim, served as his interpreter, and afterwards wrote down what he could remember of what Yahshua had done and said. As he put these accounts in the scroll, he did not know in what order these events occurred, thus we have in Mark, the model for the other three Gospels.

- "But again he made hakhchashah (denial). And after a little [while] again the ones having stood by were saying to Kefa, "You are one of them, for indeed you are a Gelili" (inhabitant of the Galil). *OJBC .Young's Literal Translation*:⁷⁰and he was again denying. And after a little again, those standing near said to Peter, 'Truly thou art of them, for thou also art a Galilean, and thy speech is alike;' _But he was again denying [it]. And after a little while, again, the ones having stood by said to Peter, "Surely you are [one] of them, for you also are a Galilean, and your accent is like [theirs]."*Analytical Literal Translation Mark 14:70*⁵
- "In Palestinian Aramaic the dialect of Galilee was different from that of Judea, and a result of the religious separation of the Jews and the Samaritans, a special Samaritan dialect evolved, but its literature cannot be considered Jewish." **The Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol.2**

With the publication of "*The Jewish Wars*" by Josephus (75 C.E.), which did not mention Yahshua, the Nazarenes wanted a biographical account of the Master/*Moshiach* available for the Believers to read.

There was also the circulation of instructions to the *talmidim* which were carried by those traveling to other communities. One document consisted of passages from the *TaNaK* which proved Yahshua was the Messiah. The Dead Sea Scrolls demonstrate to us how this type of biblical exegesis was done. The other document was a scroll containing the sayings of Yahshua. We have a rabbinical example of this in the "*Gospel of Thomas*" found in Egypt.

No Originals

So far there have been no Hebrew or Aramaic originals found of the *TaNaK* or *Brit Chadasha*. In fact there are no original copies of any of the books of the Bible. This means that an original set of either set of Scriptures does not exist today. A problematic full Hebrew text of the *TaNaK* was printed in Italy in 1488 CE. The Venice edition of the *TaNaK* appeared in 1524-25 CE. A Bible having both Covenants was printed in Latin in 1592 CE (the Clementine Edition). It is true that there are over 300,000 variant manuscripts of the *Brit Chadasha*, however, we also have to note that the Jewish copiers destroyed any old scrolls after they were copied, thus any evidence of any variance was destroyed. Destroying any texts that had any variance limited the the number of scrolls that differed from the Masoretic text. Remember the Masoretic text was compiled in the 10th Century CE by Aharon ben Asher with only one surviving original (the Leningrad Codex from 1099 CE). There has been a text (the Aleppo Codex) found in 1947 dated around the year 900CE. We must note that the Torah scrolls used today do not match the Samaritan Torah Scrolls in 6,000 instances as well as variances from the Dead Sea Scrolls and the LXX (Septuagint), which are all more ancient documents.⁶ Therefore, according to the Torah law of Equal Weights and Measures, their argument that there are no original texts of the *Brit Chadasha* really does not really hold water if we apply the same standard to the *TaNaK*.

Hebraic Meaning Lost

One learned in Judaism can see clearly that the Gospel of Matthew is Hebraic in nature, but because of how it is written in the Greek we can see that the Greek interpreter of this account made many translational slips. This is overwhelming evidence that the Greek translator misunderstood his rendering of the Hebrew or Aramaic text into the Greek.

⁵ George Lamsa claims that Kepha was exposed because of his Aramaic speech and accent.

⁶ First Response Handbook by Rabbi M.J. Koniuchowsky pg.23

The Greek translation lost many of the Hebraic word plays and poetic parallelisms. It also shows a lack of understanding of the Hebrew prayers, liturgy, and doxologies used in Rav Shaul's letters. If there slips or errors, they are only carelessness and inattentiveness on the part of the Greek translators and not the original Hebrew text⁷.

- “From earliest times, the Christian community believed that Matthew was written in Hebrew/Aramaic and translated into Greek.” **George Howard, Hebrew Gospel of Matthew ,pg.233**
- “The versions translated from the Semitic languages into Greek and Latin were subject to constant revisions. Learned men who copied them introduced changes, trying to simplify obscurities and ambiguities which were due to the work of the first translators.” **George Lamsa, Introduction, Holy Bible pg.vi**
- “The Israelites never wrote their sacred literature in a language but Aramaic and Hebrew, which are sister languages. The Septuagint was made in the 3rd century BCE, for the Alexandrian Jews. This version was never officially read by the Jews of Palestine who spoke Aramaic and read Hebrew...Evidently Y'shua and his disciples used a text which came from an older Hebrew original. This is apparent because Y'shua's quotations from the OT agree with the Peshitta text but do not agree with the Greek text.” **George Lamsa,op.cit.pg.ix**

The problem is that without Hebraic translation notes and references, the Jewish Messiah gets lost in the translations and commentaries of the Church. This leads the reader into error and disconnects him from the Hebraic roots of the *Brit Chadasha*. The translators have to be well versed in Hebrew/Aramaic and Greek, and also have to immerse himself in the culture, history, and the library of relevant writings and thought of that time period.

This would include all the Jewish writings that were known and used by the writers of the *Brit Chadasha*, such as the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. A lack of education results in misinterpretations of the Hebraic Scriptures and the teachings of Yahshua.

- “Early Christian literature thus reflects the world of the Sages at an earlier stage than its reflection in the Jewish sources.” **David Flusser,Jewish Sources of Early Christianity,pg.10**

The brilliant Jewish scholar David Flusser also wrote:

- “From ancient Jewish writings we could easily construct a whole Gospel without using a single word that originated with Y'shua.” **David Flusser, Jesus, Herder & Herder,1969,1968,72**

Also, Dr. Joseph Klausner, one of the Jewish pioneers in the study of the texts concerning the *Brit Chadasha* concluded in his studies the following:

- “Of course, Paul did not study in the schools of the Greek philosophers, and it cannot be possible that he consciously accepted the doctrines of the pagan mystery religions. Moreover, there is nothing in the teachings of Paul, and there is nothing in the teachings of Y'shua, which is not grounded on the *TaNak* or the Apocryphal, Pseudepigraphical, and Tannaitic literature of his time.” **Joseph Klausner, From Jesus to Paul, N.Y.;McMillan,1943) 482**
- “However, Y'shua himself did not deliver a single word with intent to found a new religion or a new religious community...” **Dr.Joseph Klausner, op.cit.pg.260**

Conclusion

We may conclude from the above that the *Brit Chadasha* is a reliable document that was written originally in Hebrew or Aramaic and then translated into the Greek. It is true these Greek manuscripts may differ in a few verses, but still there is a great consistency. Since the Roman Church was not in control until around 325CE, they could not have had the Hebrew manuscripts to tamper with as many claim. By 325 CE there were too many Greek translations circulating the world to accuse them of tampering with all of them in existence at that time.

The objection raised in your question could be said about the *TaNak* also since the Masoretic text varies from the LXX and the Dead Sea Scrolls literally hundreds of times.

⁷ An example is in Phil. 2:21 – the word should be “chrestos- useful” not Christos, so Rav Shaul said, “It is useful for me to live, and an advantage to die...”

Changes have been made in the Masoretic text of the TaNaK and there are errors in it also. These errors contradict the Dead Sea Scrolls, the LXX, and the Aramaic Peshitta⁸.

The message of the Brit Chadasha is a consistent basic message and is a reliable source for the teachings of the Messiah and His *talmidim*.

Rabbi Yechiel Lichenstein, who was an adamant anti-Missionary in 19th Century Hungary, picked up a copy of the Brit Chadasha. He had hurled it into the corner of his study forty years earlier. It was covered with dust. After he read it, he wrote:

- “I had thought the New Testament to be impure, a source of pride, of selfishness, of hatred, and the worst kind of violence, but as I opened it I felt myself peculiarly and wonderfully taken possession of. A sudden glory, a light flashed through my soul. I looked for thorns and found roses; I discovered pearls instead of pebbles; instead of hatred-love; instead of vengeance-forgiveness; instead of bondage-freedom; instead of pride-humility; conciliation instead of enmity; instead of death-life, salvation, resurrection, heavenly treasure. From every line in the New Testament, from every word, the Jewish spirit streamed forth light, life, power, endurance, faith, hope, love, charity, limitless and indestructible faith in Elohim, kindness to progenerality, moderation to self-denial, content to the exclusion of all sense of need, consideration for others, with extreme strictness as regards to self, all these things were found pervading the book”⁹



⁸ First Response Handbook by M.J. Koniuchowsky pg.25

⁹ Gartenhause, Famous Hebrew Christians, pg. 124