

# Aramaic Peshitta –the Authorized Bible of the Church of the East

Translation of the New Testament into English is based on Peshitta manuscripts which have comprised the accepted Bible of all of those Christians who have used Syriac as their language of prayer and worship for many centuries. It is appropriate that as we have translations based on the Greek Septuagint of the Old Testament and on the Latin Bible of Jerome, so also should there be available to the modern reader that form of the text which was translated anciently into a branch of the Aramaic language which has been used by Christians from earliest times.

In the long history of the Aramaic language, there are three periods of special interest to us. From the sixth to the fourth century before Christ, it was a language of empire extending from the borders of Persia to those of Europe, and down the Nile through the length of Egypt. It was in those days spoken and written by the Jewish people at least equally with Hebrew; and so we have parts of Ezra and Daniel, and one verse in Jeremiah (10:11), that were composed in Aramaic and preserved in that ancient form of the language in the midst of the Hebrew Old Testament.

In the first century, Jesus and his earliest followers certainly spoke Aramaic for the most part, although they also knew Hebrew. Therefore the Gospel message was first preached in the Aramaic of the Jews of Palestine. Modern scholarship tells us that the originals of the Four Gospels and of other parts of the New Testament were written in Greek; this is disputed by the Church of the East and by some noted Western scholars. Regardless of which view one may accept, Aramaic speech is an underlying factor and it is unquestionably true that documents written in Aramaic were drawn on by writers of the New Testament, the basic inspired form of the Christian message.

Aramaic was the language of the Church that spread east, almost from the beginning of Christianity, from Antioch and Jerusalem, beyond the confines of the Roman Empire. This differed from the language of Palestine in choice of words and grammatical forms rather more extensively than does American English from British English and in written form these differences became regular and standardized. The Jews and Christians used the literary dialect of Aramaic that we call Syriac almost at the same time to propagate their translations of the sacred books brought from Palestine and the West, reaching into Syria and Mesopotamia and the nearby mountains, quite early into India, and into China in the course of time. Modern scholarship believes that as happened in other parts of the Church, the earliest copies of the sacred books in Syriac were revised again and again to bring them closer to the standard of the Hebrew and Greek texts from which they were drawn; this view, too, is not accepted by the Church of the East. Under any conditions by the fifth century A.D. the Peshitta version in its present form held the field by universal acclaim.

The fixed stand of the Church of the East with respect to some of the points mentioned above can best be understood by reference to the following letter, which we are authorized to quote, from the Patriarch and Head of that Church:

Patriarchate of the East, Modesto, California, April 5, 1957

"With reference to your letter concerning the translation of the Aramaic Bible, and the originality of the Peshitta text, as the Patriarch and Head of the Holy Apostolic and Catholic Church of the East we wish to state, that the Church of the East received the scriptures from the hands of the blessed Apostles themselves in the Aramaic original, the language spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and that the Peshitta is the text of the Church of the East which has come down from the Biblical times without any change or revision."

--Mar Eshai Shimun  
by Grace, Catholicos Patriarch  
of the East

From the Mediterranean east into India the Peshitta is still the Bible of preference among Christians, though today nearly all who use it speak Arabic, or one of the tongues of South India. West of the Euphrates, spoken Aramaic as a mother-tongue survives today only in two mountain villages northwest of Damascus, differing as much from the speech of Jesus' day as French from its parent Latin. East of the Euphrates, in the Kurdish mountains, and near Lake Urmia, perhaps a hundred thousand people (Christian, Jew and Muslim) speak another form of it, strangely mixed with borrowed words from the various languages of their polyglot neighbors, but still basically akin to the Aramaic (Syriac) of olden times.

Manuscripts used in making translations were the Codex Ambrosianus for the Old Testament and the so-called Mortimer-McCawley manuscript for the New Testament; the former is in the Ambrosian Library at Milan, Italy, and has been identified as fifth century A.D.; the latter was used for our previous translation of the New Testament, of which this edition is a revision, and has been variously identified as sixth or seventh century A.D. Comparisons have been had with Peshitta manuscripts in the Morgan Library, New York, N. Y., with manuscripts in the Freer Collection, Washington, D. C., with the Urmiah edition, and with a manuscript of the Peshitta Old Testament in the British Museum, the oldest *dated* Biblical manuscript in existence. Our translator states that comparisons show no differences in text between these various manuscripts, and that he has filled in the few missing portions of Chronicles from other authentic Peshitta sources.

North of the Garden of Eden in the basin of the river Tigris, in the mountain fastnesses of what is known today as Kurdistan, there lived an ancient people, the descendants of the Assyrians, the founders of the great Assyrian empire and culture in Bible days, the originators of the alphabet and many sciences which contributed so generously to the Semitic culture from which sprang our Bible. These people, the Assyrians, played an important part in the history of the Near East, of the Bible, and of religion in general.

When Nineveh was destroyed in 612 B.C., many of the princes and noblemen of this once vast empire fled northward into inaccessible mountains where they remained secluded and cut off until the dawn of the twentieth century. Nahum says: "Thy shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria: thy nobles shall dwell in the dust: thy people is scattered upon the mountains, and no man gathered them." Nah. 3:18.

Some descendants of the Assyrians and some of the descendants of the ten tribes who were taken captive by the Assyrian kings in 721 B.C., and settled in Assyria, Babylon, Persia and other places east of the river Euphrates, were among the first converts to Christianity.

When Jesus sent seventy of his disciples to preach the gospel, he instructed them not to go in the way of the Gentiles or into any city of the Samaritans but to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, meaning the ten tribes who were lost from the house of Israel. Some of the descendants of these Hebrew tribes are still living in Iraq, Iran, and Turkey, and most of them still converse in Aramaic. Jesus' command was carried out. The gospel was preached to the Jews first. "Now those who had been dispersed by the persecution which occurred on account of Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and even to the land of Cyprus and to Antioch, preaching the word to none but to the Jews only." Acts 11: 19.

The Assyrians remained dormant during the Persian, Greek, Roman and Arab conquests. Being isolated and surrounded by their enemies, they remained secluded throughout the centuries, thus preserving the Aramaic language, which was the language of the Near East, and perpetuating the ancient Biblical customs and manners which were common to all races and peoples in this part of the ancient world. Not until the Turkish reign did these isolated Assyrian tribes recognize any government or pay any taxes. During the centuries of Arab and Turkish reigns, the Assyrians retained, their cultural independence, later recognizing the sympathetic Turkish rule which permitted the continuation of their institutions and their religion. Under magnanimous Turks they were ruled by their patriarchs and chiefs, paying a nominal tax to the Turkish government.

The Assyrian church, or as it is known, the ancient Apostolic and Catholic Church of the East, was one of the strongest Christian churches in the world and was noted for its missions in the Middle East, India, and China. Its missionaries carried the Christian gospel as far as China and Mongolia, Indonesia, Japan and other parts of the world. Not until the 14th century was this church rivaled by any other church in the world. It was the most powerful branch of Christendom in the 'Near East, Palestine, Arabia, Lebanon, Iran, India and elsewhere.

All the literature of this church was written in literary Aramaic, the lingua franca of that time. This is corroborated by Dr. Arnold J. Toynbee in his *A Study of History* wherein he writes: " . . . Darius the Great's account of his own acts on the rock of Behistan, overhanging the

Empire's great north-east road, was transcribed in triplicate in three different adaptations of the cuneiform script conveying the three imperial capitals: Elamite for Susa, Medo-Persian for Ecbatana, and Akkadian for Babylon. But the winning language within this universal state was none of the three thus officially honoured; it was Aramaic, with its handier alphabetic script. The sequel showed that commerce and culture may be more important than politics in making a language's fortune; for the speakers of Aramaic were politically of no account in the Achaemenian Empire . . . "

The Persians used the Aramaic language because this tongue was the language of the two Semitic empires, the empire of Assyria and the empire of Babylon. Aramaic was so firmly established as the lingua franca that no government could dispense with its use as a vehicle of expression in a far-flung empire, especially in the western provinces. Moreover, without schools and other modern facilities, Aramaic could not be replaced by the speech of conquering nations. Conquerors were not interested in imposing their languages and cultures on subjugated peoples. What they wanted was taxes, spoils, and other levies.

The transition from Aramaic into Arabic, a sister tongue, took place after the conquest of the Near East by the Moslem armies in the 7th century, A.D. Nevertheless, Aramaic lingered for many centuries and still is spoken in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and northwestern Iran, as well as among the Christian Arab tribes in northern Arabia. Its alphabet was borrowed by the Hebrews, Arabs, Iranians, and Mongols.

Dr. Philip K. Hitti, noted historian and Professor of Semitic languages at Princeton University, in his book *The History of the Arabs*, uses the terms *Aramaic* and *Syriac* interchangeably and states that Aramaic is still a living language. He says, "In country places and on their farms these dhimmis clung to their ancient cultural patterns and preserved their native languages: Aramaic and Syriac in Syria and Al-'Iraq, Iranian in Persia and Coptic in Egypt." And again, "In Al-'Iraq and Syria the transition from one Semitic tongue, the Aramaic, to another, the Arabic, was of course easier. In the out-of-the-way places, however, such as the Lebanons with their preponderant Christian population, the native Syriac put up a desperate fight and has lingered until modern times. Indeed Syriac is still spoken in Ma'lula and two other villages in Anti-Lebanon. With its disappearance, Aramaic has left in the colloquial Arabic unmistakable traces noticeable in vocabulary, accent and grammatical structure." \* \*

The late Dr. W. A. Wigram in *The Assyrians and Their Neighbours* wrote: "One thing is certain, that the Assyrians boast with justice that they alone of all Christian nations still keep as their spoken language what is acknowledged to be the language of Palestine in the first century . . ." \*\*\*

Quoting Dr. Toynbee again from *A Study of History*: " .. As for the Aramaic alphabet, it achieved far wider conquests. In 1599 A.D., it was adopted for the conveyance of the Manchu language on the eve of the Manchu conquest of China. The higher religions sped it on its way by taking it into their service. In its `Square Hebrew' variant it became the vehicle of the Jewish Scriptures and liturgy; in an Arabic adaptation it became the alphabet of Islam . " \*

As a miracle of miracles, Aramaic and most of the ancient Biblical customs which were common to Semitic people have survived in northern Iraq until today. Aramaic is still spoken in Iraq and in northwestern Iran by remnants of the Assyrian people and the Jews of the exile, and the literary Aramaic remains the same today as it was of yore. Some of the Aramaic words which are still retained in all Bible versions are still used in the Aramaic language spoken today: for

'The Greeks called it *Syriac* (derived from Sur, Tyre).

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example, *Raca, Ethpatakh, Rabbuli, Lemana, Shabakthani, Talitha Koomi, Maran Etha, Manna, Khakal-Dema*.

As we have said, the survival of this small remnant of this segment of the ancient Semitic culture was due to the isolation, tenacity, and warlike character of the Assyrian people who were living isolated, now under the Parthian Empire, now under the Persian Empire, now under the Arabian Empire and now under the Turkish Empire. And because of this isolation, these ancient Christians had hardly any contact with Christians in the West. Only one of their bishops and a deacon participated in the Nicene Council in 325 A.D.

After the conversion of Emperor Constantine to Christianity in 318 A.D., Christians in the Persian Empire who hitherto had been tolerated and looked upon as the enemies of Rome, the persecutor of Christianity, now were looked upon as the friends of the Christian emperor, Constantine, and the enemies of the Persian government. Persecution of these Christians did not begin until the 4th century A.D. and lasted until the Arab conquest of Persia, 632 A.D. This is why this ancient Church was unable to establish contacts with Western Christianity.

The Scriptures in the Church of the East, from the inception of Christianity to the present day, are in Aramaic and have never been tampered with or revised, as attested by the present Patriarch of the Church of the East. The Biblical manuscripts were carefully and zealously handed down from one generation to another and kept in the massive stone walls of the ancient churches and in caves. They were written on parchment and many of them survive to the present day. When these texts were copied by expert scribes, they were carefully examined for accuracy before they were dedicated and permitted to be read in churches. Even one missing letter would render the text void. Easterners still adhere to God's commandment not to add to or omit a word from the Scriptures. The Holy Scripture condemns any addition or subtraction or modification of the Word of God.

"You shall not add to the commandment which I command you, neither shall you take from it, but you must keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you." Deut. 4:2.

"Everything that I command you, that you must be careful to do; you shall not add nor take from it." Deut. 12:32.

"Do not add to his words; lest he reprove you, and you be found a liar." Prov. 30:6.

"And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his portion from the tree of life and from the holy city and from the things which are written in this book." Rev. 22:19.

It is also true of the Jews and Moslems that they would not dare to alter a word of the Torah or Koran. Easterners are afraid that they may incur the curse if they make a change in the Word of God.

Some of these ancient manuscripts go back to the 5th century A.D. The oldest dated Biblical manuscript in the world is that of the four Books of Moses, 464 A.D., which now lies in the British Museum. Another one is the Codex Ambrosianus. Some of it goes back to the 7th century, some of it to the 5th century, and some of it might be earlier. This Codex is not the work of one man. Apparently some portions were written before the vowel system was invented and that would put it prior to the 5th century. The Pentateuch of the British Museum must have been written before the vowel system was invented. Aramaic documents of the 5th century and later use the vowel system, some of them fully and some in part. It is interesting to know that this vowel system was adopted by the Jews and was begun about the 5th century, A.D. In some portions of the above texts, the old Aramaic original consonantal spelling without apparatus of vowel points is well preserved. This is also true of some of the New Testament texts in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York City.

Unfortunately many ancient and valuable Aramaic texts were lost during World War I. But printed copies of them, carefully made by American missionaries under the help and guidance of competent native scholars, are available. Moreover, a number of ancient New Testament texts, some of them going back to the 5th century A.D. are in various libraries. The New Testament texts in the Pierpont Morgan Library are among the oldest in existence.

Astonishingly enough, all the Peshitta texts in Aramaic agree. There is one thing of which the Eastern scribes can boast: they copied their holy books diligently, faithfully, and meticulously. Sir Frederick Kenyon, Curator of the British Museum, in his book *Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, speaks highly of the accuracy of copying and of the antiquity of Peshitta MSS.

The versions translated from 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. Present translators and Bible revisers do the same when translating the Bible, treaties, and documents from one language to another. The American Constitution, written in English, will always remain the same when new copies are made, but translations into other languages will be subject to revision. Therefore, a copy of the United States Constitution published ten years ago is far more

valuable than a translation made two hundred years ago. Translations are always subject to revisions and disputes over exact meaning because words and terms of speech in one language cannot be translated easily into another without loss. This is one reason why we have so many translations and revisions of the King James version.

As said before, Aramaic was the language of Semitic culture, the language of the Hebrew patriarchs and, in the older days, the lingua franca of the Fertile Crescent. The term "Hebrew" is derived from the Aramaic word *Abar* or *Habar* which means "to cross over." This name was given to the Hebrew people simply because Abraham and the people who were with him crossed the river Euphrates and went to Palestine. Therefore, they were known by those who lived east of the river Euphrates as Hebrews, that is, "the people across the river." All branches of the great Semitic people had a common speech. How could the people of Nineveh have understood Jonah, a Hebrew prophet, had the Biblical Hebrew tongue been different from Aramaic? There were some differences similar to the differences we have in English spoken in Tennessee and that spoken in New York.

This small pastoral Hebrew tribe through which God chose to reveal himself to mankind, for several generations continued to keep its paternal and racial relations with the people who lived in Padan-Aram (Mesopotamia), and preserved customs and manners which they brought with them from Padan-Aram, and the language which their fathers spoke. Jacob changed the name of Luz to Beth-el (Aramaic-the house of God). Abraham instructed his servant not to let his son, Isaac, marry a Palestinian maid but to go to Padan-Aram to his own kindred from whence to bring a maid to his son. Years later, Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, went to Padan-Aram and married his uncle's two daughters and their handmaids and lived in Haran about twenty years. Eleven of his sons were born in Padan-Aram. The first generation of the children of Jacob went to Egypt. Their sojourn in Palestine was so brief that there was no possibility of linguistic change. That is why they spoke the language which they had learned in Padan-Aram. While in Egypt, living by themselves, they continued to use names of Aramaic derivation such as Manasseh, Ephraim, Bar-Nun, Miriam, etc.

After the captivity, Aramaic became the vernacular of the Jewish people and is still used by them in their worship. Both of the Jewish Talmu, namely, the Babylonian and Palestinian, were written in Aramaic. The later findings, especially of Jewish-Aramaic papyri which were found in Egypt in 1900, have produced many passages in Biblical Aramaic. The discovery of the Commentary on the Book of Habakkuk in the caves of Qumran in Jordan proves that Aramaic has been in constant use from early times to the present day.

It is evident that during the exile and post-exile the Hebrew writers used Aramaic. Some of the portions of their works were put into Hebrew. Daniel and Ezra were born during the captivity. Hebrew was no longer spoken and the official language of writing in Babylon was southern Aramaic and the Jewish community had already parted with their Hebrew.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the captivity produced the transition from Hebrew, a sister language, into Aramaic.

<sup>1</sup> The two languages were so close that Hebrew • could not be retained in Babylon,

Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic were very closely related, like American English and English spoken in England. Whether the Hebrew prophets wrote in Hebrew or Aramaic would make little difference. The differences would be like those between several Arabic dialects which are spoken in Arabia. Even though the vernacular speech differs because of local color and idioms, the norm of the written language remains the same. This is true today with written Arabic when compared with spoken Arabic. And such was the case with Attic Greek when compared with other Greek dialects. The grammar, verbs, nouns and other parts of speech are practically the same in the basic ancient Biblical Hebrew language and Aramaic. The structure of a sentence, in point of grammar and syntax of Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic, is the same. But this is not the case when translating from Hebrew or Aramaic into a totally alien tongue such as Greek, Latin, or English. Moreover, the alphabet in Hebrew and Aramaic is exactly the same and all letters are pronounced alike.

*The Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol. II, tells us:*

"In Palestinian Aramaic the dialect of Galilee was different from that of Judea, and as a result of the religious separation of the Jews and the Samaritans, a special Samaritan dialect was evolved, but its literature cannot be considered Jewish. To the eastern Aramaic, whose most distinctive point of difference is "n" in place of "y" as the prefix for the third person masculine of the imperfect tense of the verb, belong the idioms of the Babylonian Talmud, which most closely agree with the language of the Mandaean writings."\*

The strongest points in ascertaining the originality of a text are the style of writing, the idioms, and the internal evidence. Words which make sense and are easily understood in one language, when translated literally into another tongue, may lose their meaning. One can offer many instances where scores of Aramaic words, some with several meanings and others with close resemblance to other words, were confused and thus mistranslated.

This is why in Jeremiah 4: 10, we read in the King James:

- ... Ah, LORD God! surely thou hast greatly deceived this people ... " The Aramaic reads:

" . . . Ah, LORD God! I have greatly deceived this people. . . " The translator's confusion is due to the position of a dot, for the position of a dot frequently determines the meaning of a word.

In Isaiah 43:28, the King James version reads:

"Therefore, I have profaned the princes of the sanctuary... "

The Aramaic reads

- ... Your princes have profaned my sanctuary. . . " This error was caused by misunderstanding of a passive plural verb. The same error occurs in John 12:40, which in the Eastern Text reads:

" ... Their eyes have become blind. . . " instead of " ... He hath blinded their eyes..."

In Isaiah 14:12, the Aramaic word *ailal*, to howl, is confused by the Hebrew word *helel*, light. The reference here is to the king of Babylon and not to Lucifer. In Psalm 22:29, King James version, we read:

"All they that be fat upon earth shall eat and worship- . . . and none can keep alive his own soul."

The Aramaic text reads:

"All those who are hungry (for truth) shall eat and worship ... my soul is alive to him." The error in this instance is due to the confusion of the Aramaic words which have some resemblance. Some of these words when written by hand resemble one another.

## THE ARAMAIC PESHITTA TEXT

The term Peshitta means straight, simple, sincere and true, that is, the original. This name was given to this ancient and authoritative text to distinguish it from which was inherited from Semitic languages. This is true also of all languages into which the Bible has been translated.

The Septuagint is based on early Hebrew manuscripts and not on the later ones known as the Massoretic, which were made in the 6th to the 9th centuries. In other words, there are many similarities between the Septuagint and the Peshitta text but the former contains inevitable mistranslations which were due to difficulties in transmitting Hebrew or Aramaic thought and mannerisms of speech into a totally alien tongue like Greek. But as has been said, such was not the case between Biblical Aramaic and Biblical Hebrew which are of the same origin. Josephus used Aramaic and Hebrew words indiscriminately. Thus, the term "translating" from Hebrew into Aramaic or vice versa is incorrect. It would be like one stating as having translated the United States Constitution from the Pennsylvania language into the English language or from lower German to higher German. Even before the first captivity, 721 B.C., Jewish kings, scribes, and learned men understood Aramaic. 2 Kings 18:26.

The Israelites never wrote their sacred literature in any language but Aramaic and Hebrew, which are sister languages. The Septuagint was made in the 3rd century, B.C., for the Alexandrian Jews. This version was never officially read by the Jews in Palestine who spoke Aramaic and read Hebrew. Instead, the Jewish authorities condemned the work and declared a period of mourning because of the defects in the version. Evidently Jesus and his disciples used a text which came from an older Hebrew original. This is apparent because Jesus' quotations from the Old Testament agree with the Peshitta text but do not agree with the Greek text. For example, in John 12:40, the Peshitta Old Testament and New Testament agree. This is not all. Jesus and his disciples not only could not converse in Greek but they never heard it spoken.

We believe that the Scriptures were conceived and inspired by the Holy Spirit and written by Hebrew prophets who spoke and wrote, as the Holy Spirit moved them, to the people in their

days, using idioms, similes, parables and metaphors in order to convey their messages. Moreover, these men of God sacrificed their lives that the Word of God might live. The Jewish race treasured these sacred writings as a priceless possession.

Writing was prevalent from the earliest days. The Israelites made more extensive use of the instrument of writing than neighboring nations such as the Ammonites, Moabites, and other kindred people round about them. Moses wrote the Ten Commandments; Joshua wrote on an altar which he built west of Jordan. The Israelites were admonished to fasten the commandments to their foreheads and necks and to write them on their doorsteps. Everything was written at the time it was revealed. God said to Moses,

"Now therefore write this song for them, and teach it to the children of Israel; and put it into their mouths; this song will be a witness for me against the children of Israel." Deut. 31:19.

"And the LORD answered me and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tablets, that he who reads it may understand it clearly." Hab. 2:2. Thus, the Old Testament Scriptures were written very early.

This is also true of the Gospels. They were written a few years after the resurrection and some of the portions were written by Matthew while Jesus 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. Josephus states that even though a number of Jews had tried to learn the language of the Greeks, hardly any of them succeeded.

Josephus wrote (42 A.D.): "I have also taken a great deal of pains to obtain the learning of the Greeks, and understand the elements of the Greek language; although I have so accustomed myself to speak our own tongue, that I cannot pronounce Greek with sufficient exactness. For our nation does not encourage those that learn the language of many nations. On this account, **as there have** been many who have done their endeavors, with great patience, to obtain this Greek learning, there have yet hardly been two or three that have succeeded herein, who were immediately rewarded for their pains." *Antiquities XX, XI 2*.

Indeed, the teaching of Greek was forbidden by Jewish rabbis. It was said that it was better for a man to give his child meat of swine than to teach him the language of the Greeks.

When the King James translation was made, western scholars had no access to the East as we have today. In the 16th century, A.D., the Turkish empire had extended its borders as far as Vienna. One European country after another was falling under the impact of the valiant Turkish army. Europe was almost conquered. This is not all. The reformations and controversies in the Western Church had destroyed Christian unity. Moreover, the Scriptures in Aramaic were unknown in Europe. The only recourse scholars had was to Latin and to a few

portions of Greek manuscripts. This is clearly seen from the works of Erasmus. Besides, the knowledge of Greek was almost lost at this time and Christians were just emerging from the Dark Ages.

Many people have asked why the King James' translators did not use the Peshitta text from Aramaic or the Scriptures used in the East. The answer is: there were no contacts between East and West until after the conquest of India by Great Britain and the rise of the imperial power of Britain in the Near East, Middle East, and the Far East. It is a miracle that the King James' translators were able to produce such a remarkable translation from sources available in this dark period of European history. Even fifty years ago, the knowledge of Western scholars relative to the Eastern Scriptures in Aramaic and the Christian Church in the East was conjectural. Moreover, these scholars knew very little of the Eastern customs and manners in which the Biblical literature was nurtured. Thank God, today new discoveries have been made; new facts have come to light; new democratic institutions and governments have been established in the East. What in the 16th and 17th centuries was viewed at a long distance now can be seen face to face. Today, not only scholars, ministers, and Bible teachers walk on Palestinian soil but also thousands of men and women visit Biblical lands every year.

For centuries translations from Semitic languages have been subject to revision. They are, even now, subject to revision. This is why there are so many Bible versions varying each from the other. Let us just take one instance which I consider very important. In the King James version, we read in Numbers 25:4:

"And the LORD said unto Moses, Take all the heads of the people, and hang them up before the LORD against the sun, that the fierce anger of the LORD may be turned away from Israel."

The Aramaic reads

"And the LORD said to Moses, Take all the chiefs of the people and expose them before the LORD in the daylight that the fierce anger of the LORD may be turned away from the children of Israel."

Some noted Greek scholars in recent translations have changed the word hang to execute, but this is not what the original writer said. God could not have told Moses to behead or execute all Israelites. The Lord was angry at the princes of Israel because of the sin of Baal-peor. They had been lax in enforcing the law and also guilty in joining the sensual Baal worship.

And in 1 Corinthians 7:36 and 38, King James, we read:

"But if any man think that he behaveth himself uncomely toward his virgin, if she pass the flower of her age, and needs so require, let him do what he will, he sinneth not: let them marry." "So then he that giveth her in marriage doeth well; but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better."

The Aramaic reads:

"If any man thinks that he is shamed by the behavior of his virgin daughter because she has passed the marriage age and he has not given her in marriage and that he should give her, let him do what he will and he does not sin. Let her be married." "So then he who gives his virgin daughter in marriage does well; and he who does not give his virgin daughter in marriage does even better." Some of the scholars use "betrothed" instead of "virgin daughter." The American Standard Version of 1901 correctly used the term "virgin daughter." Certainly the King James' translators would have known the difference between "virgin daughter" and "betrothed." Paul, in this instance, is referring to a virgin's vow. Num. 30:16.

These discrepancies between various versions have been the cause of contentions and divisions among sincere men and women who are earnestly seeking to understand the Word of God. At times, they do not know what to believe and what not to believe. They cannot understand why the Scripture in one place says, "Love your father and mother" and in another place admonishes, "Hate your father and mother." Moreover, they are bewildered when told that Jesus on the cross cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The King James says in John 16:32, "Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me." Then again, the Old Testament in many instances states that God does not forsake the righteous nor those who trust in him. Jesus was the son of God and entrusted his spirit to God. Jesus could not have contradicted himself.

The Peshitta text reads: "My God, my God, for this I was spared!"

After all the Bible is an Eastern Book, written primarily for the Israelites, and then for the Gentile world.

When we come to the New Testament, the new Covenant, we must not forget that Christianity grew out of Judaism. The Christian gospel was another of God's messages, first to the Jewish people and then to the Gentile world. For several centuries, the Christian movement was directed and guided by the Jews. All of the apostles and the evangelists were Jewish. These facts are strongly supported by the gospels and history.

The Pauline Epistles were letters written by Paul to small Christian congregations in Asia Minor, Greece, and Rome. These early Christians were mostly Jews of the dispersion, men and women of Hebrew origin who had been looking for the coming of the promised Messiah whose coming was predicted by the Hebrew prophets who had hailed him as a deliverer.

At the outset, the Romans were the masters of the world and the Greeks were not looking for a deliverer to rise up from among a people whom they hated and had crushed. Paul, on his journeys, always spoke in the Jewish synagogues. His first converts were Hebrews. Then came Arameans, the kindred of the Hebrews, as in the case of Timothy and Titus. Their fathers were Aramean and their mothers were Jewish.

Jesus and his disciples spoke the Galilean dialect of Aramaic, the language which the early Galileans had brought from the other side of the river Euphrates. 2 Kings 17:22-25. Mark tells us in his Gospel, 14:70 that Peter was exposed by his Galilean Aramaic speech.

Paul, in all of his Epistles, emphasizes Hebrew law, Jewish ordinances and temple rituals. He refers to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as "our fathers." In his letters and teaching he appeals to the Jewish people to accept Jesus as the promised Messiah. Paul's mission was first to his own people. When they refused to listen to him, he shook his garment and went out among the Gentiles. Acts 18:6. Paul preached the Christian gospel written in Aramaic. His Epistles were written years later when Christianity had spread into Syria and parts of the Near East and India. In other words, the Pauline Epistles were letters addressed to the Christian churches already established. Moreover, Paul, in nearly all of his

Epistles, speaks of the Hebrew fathers, subjugation in Egypt, crossing the Red Sea, eating manna, and wandering in the desert. This proves beyond a doubt that these letters were written to members of the Hebrew race and not to the Gentile world who knew nothing of Hebrew history and divine promises made to them. The Greeks had not been persecuted in Egypt nor did they cross the Red Sea, nor did they eat manna in the desert.

Paul was educated in Jewish law in Jerusalem. He was a member of the Jewish Council. His native language was western Aramaic but he acquired his education through Hebrew and Chaldean or Palestinian Aramaic, the language spoken in Judea. He defended himself when on trial in his own tongue and not in Greek. Acts 22:2. Paul was converted, healed, and baptized in Damascus in Syria. Acts 9:17,18.

The Epistles were translated into Greek for the use of converts who spoke Greek. Later they were translated into Latin and other tongues.

I believe that this translation of the Bible based on the Eastern text of the Scriptures, written in a Semitic tongue which for many centuries was the lingua franca of the Near East and Palestine, will throw considerable light on many obscure passages and that it will elucidate many other passages which have lost their meaning because of mistranslations.

Many church authorities in the Near East, India, and other parts of Asia have been looking for a long time for a translation of their venerable Aramaic text of the Scriptures into the English language. Many of them, despite their religious differences, have prayed for the translation and publication of this work so that thousands of educated men and women whose second language is English might read the Word of God translated from their own ancient text rather than made from secondary sources. This is also true of thousands of educated Moslems who revere the Peshitta and look upon it as the authentic text of the Scriptures.

The most accurate version recommended is Aramaic English New Testament translation by Andrew Gabriel Roth available at [www.aent.org](http://www.aent.org)