

Evidence that The Bible is The Infallible Word of God
~ Ten Reasons to Believe ~
Lesson #3 • Translating to Survive
• H A N D O U T •

► We will pick up our study this time with the question we ended with last time: **Why would the Jewish people ever allow their sacred scriptures to be translated into another language?**

This study will answer that question. In doing so, will show that the unbroken chain of scriptural evidence continues into and beyond the early New Testament era.

Responsibility for the continuation of the entirety of God's sacred Word, now shifts from the Jewish people who continued to adhere to the Law, to the New Testament believers who understood that true salvation came through their faith and the gift of Grace from Father God through His Son, Jesus Messiah, and not through the Law. This truth will be made clear when we look at the New Testament's evidence of trustworthiness.

So, let's ask the question again:
Why was the Hebrew Text translated into another language?

► To answer that question we need to understand a bit about the political and sociological events that preceded the actual translation process.

During the first year of King Cyrus the Great's reign in Persia, Zerubbabel was given permission to lead 42,360 Exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem. This was the year 538 BC. However, the number returning represented only about half of those who could have returned, had they so chosen. It was about eighty years later, in 458 BC, during the seventh year of his reign, when King Artaxerxes sent Ezra from Babylon in Persia to Jerusalem to reorganize the religious activities and teach the correct understanding of the Mosaic Law. Then, about twelve years later, Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem to rebuild the walls. Though Zerubbabel had successfully rebuilt the Temple, the city of Jerusalem, itself, was still in shambles and the wall remained ruined from the Babylonian breach in 586 BC – 141 years before. By Nehemiah's time the Jewish men were marrying outside of Judaism and their pagan wives were raising children without any Jewish teaching or knowledge.

► Meanwhile, back in Babylon which was now Persia, even though those Jews who chose to remain developed the first synagogues – meeting places for religious purposes – their lifestyle had become quite secularized. It is amazing that they even continued to be a specific and cohesive people called Jews, considering they had chosen to live in Exile. But their adherence to the Mosaic Law became a matter of tradition, rather than conviction. We get a glimpse into their world in the Book of Esther.

Q: What does this narrative about the Jewish people after the Exile have to do with them allowing their sacred scripture to be translated into another language?

Q: Why would translating the Bible into another language remedy the people's shift to secularism?

Q: Weren't there other ways of teaching the people rather than risking an error in translating?

► **For those in Jerusalem:**

► **For those who stayed in Babylon of Persia:**

The problem became a crisis.
But when Alexander the Great, the 20 year old Macedonian King, rode onto the world stage, his insatiable desire to enlarge his kingdom by acquiring other kingdoms led to the solution for the lost skill in speaking, reading and comprehending the sacred Hebrew text.

► Alexander conquered Egypt, Persia, Northern India, Syria, and Asia Minor [Turkey] before he died at the age of 33. But he conquered much more than just empires. He turned the known ancient world upside down. He replaced existing cultures with Greek culture; he made Greek the language of commerce. The lofty ideals of the Greek culture became a unifying standard.

In Babylon of Persia, there were still a few devout men, mostly scribes and some Levites among the Jewish population, who retained their ability to read, write and study the ancient Hebrew text. But, apart from these men, few spoke Hebrew. Those who did were referred to as "Hebraic Jews." The rest of the Jews considered themselves "progressive" and "modern," and they were referred to as "Grecian" or "Hellenistic Jews." These progressive Jews spoke Greek for reasons of commerce and Aramaic as their common street language.

After conquering Egypt, Alexander established the City of Alexandria for the purpose of developing an academic center for Greek culture, eventually making it the capitol of Egypt. It was situated on the western edge of the Nile Delta with an extensive port. Alexandria became a prosperous center of business, culture and academic learning, possessing the finest library in the ancient world, boasting of over 500,000 volumes available for study. The Hellenistic and Grecian Jews flocked to Alexandria, establishing a large Jewish community there.

The influence of the Greek culture in this amazing city caused the Jewish community to lose more than its language skills; they even began to lose their sense of heritage and traditions.

► **This last loss became the gravest of concerns for the Jewish religious leaders.**

Q: Why would losing their heritage and traditions concern them more than the loss of being able to read the Hebrew text?

Q: What solution did the Jewish religious leaders come up with?

Q: How did they proceed to place the fleece – the test – before the Lord?

Q: What happened to the Hebrew text?

Q: What is the significance of these two translations for us today?

Before we close our discussion about manuscripts from which our English Bible was translated, we need to look at the source of one additional manuscript because it was NOT derived from either the Masoretic or Septuagint.

The Samaritan Pentateuch

Samaria was the capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. It was overrun and conquered by Assyria in 722 BC. Those who were not killed outright were taken as slaves and assimilated into the Assyrian culture. Interbreeding took place between the Assyrians and the Jew, resulting in a people called Samaritans.

Then in 586 BC, 130 years after the fall of the Northern Kingdom, Babylon laid a siege around Jerusalem and the Southern Kingdom of Judah fell, destroying the city, the temple, and sending the people into captive exile.

Seventy years later, a remnant of Judah returned to Jerusalem, led by Jerubbabel. Rebuilding the city and the Temple proved to be quite difficult. As they tried to reestablish Jerusalem as part of the caravan trade and eek out a living, they were shocked and disgusted to find these Samaritans –these people they regarded as half-breed. To a pious Jew these people were unclean and they wanted nothing to do with them.

From the Samaritan woman at the well, we get a lesson in cultural bigotry:

John 4:9 · The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

Q: What would be the expected consequences of the cultural bigotry from the Jews toward the Samaritans?

Q: Historically, what did the Samaritan's actually do?

Q: Since the Samaritan culture was developed separate from their Jewish heritage, it is logical to expect the Samaritan Pentateuch to differ from the Hebrew text. When the two are compared what do we find?

Q: When we say the name “Samaritan” we usually think of the ancient biblical religious group made famous by the kindness of the “Good Samaritan” and the encounter Jesus had with the woman at the Well. Surely these people no longer exist in modern times. So what happened to them?



Next Time:
Lesson #4

Unshakable Evidence from the Essenes

