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A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_expositor-series-1.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php)

*DID ST. PAUL USE A SEMITIC GOSPEL?*

THIS question is one of several which suggest themselves to the mind of the Bible student who wishes to investigate the extent of St. Paul's acquaintance with our present Gospels. The questions to which we refer may be arranged thus :

I. To what extent was St. Paul familiar with the *facts* of our Saviour's earthly life?

II. Was he acquainted with the *discourses* of the Saviour?

III. Is there any evidence that these discourses existed in St. Paul's day in a written form?

IV. Are there any criteria which will enable us to decide in what language these evangelic discourses were originally written; or, if not written, orally propagated?

I. The first of these questions has often been discussed. Almost every one who loves his Bible has delighted to trace the coincidences between the Epistles and the Gospels, and, by an effort of constructiveness, to realize the glorious conception which St. Paul had formed of the person of our Lord Jesus. For the most part however this subject has had a literary, or at most a theologic, interest; but, of late years, it has acquired an *evidential* value, and has come to be recognised as one of the bulwarks of our faith against a very subtle form of unbelief. When the German mythical school ventured to assert that the Gospels in their present form were not composed till far on in the second century; that the gospel miracles are purely legendary; that the grand central miracle, the resurrection, was a subjective illusion; and that almost the only portions of the New Testament which are authentic are the four great Epistles of St. Paul, Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians: then the attention of Christian apologists was

turned as never before to these four Epistles; and it was triumphantly shown that the resurrection, so far from being a legend, was accepted as a historic **fact** within a very few years of the death of Jesus, and that the **belief** in the divinity of the Saviour's person, so far from being a gradual apotheosis, or an accretion of later ages, was in all its essential respects as clearly accepted and taught by the Apostle Paul, twenty or twenty-five years after the death of Jesus, as in any of the evangelic records.

II. The second question, To what extent was St. Paul acquainted with the discourses of our Lord? has not attracted so much attention as the foregoing. To the theologian, indeed, it is not so important; but to the apologist it is almost of equal importance, as confirming the historicity of the Gospel narratives, and helping to establish the identity of the two pictures of the historic Jesus, in the Gospels and in the Pauline Epistles. It must be admitted however, that research has not, in this field, met as yet with a bounteous harvest. Dr. Westcott indeed affirms that "scarcely any clear references to the recorded discourses of the Lord are contained in the Epistles"; but this is much too despondent a view of the situation, for there are certainly *six well established cases* in which the Apostle Paul directly or indirectly quotes from words of the Lord Jesus which are contained in our present Gospels. (1) In 1 Corinthians vii. 10, where the apostle forbids divorce, and uses the words, "I give charge, yet not I, but the Lord," it is evident that he is quoting the words of the Lord Jesus which have come down to us in Matthew v. 31, 32, and Luke xvi. 18. (2) In the account of the last supper given in 1 Corinthians xi., we notice a coincidence almost verbatim with the words of Luke xxii. 19, 20. (3) In 1 Thessalonians iv. and v. St. Paul, in his description of the second advent, claims to be speaking "in the language of the Lord"

Himself, ἐν λόγῳ Κυρίου; and in many respects, as we shall show, the account given by the apostle coincides both factually and verbally with our Lord's eschatological discourse as recorded in Luke xxi. (4) The exhortations in Romans xiv. 14-21 agree in substance, but not in precise words, with several utterances in the Sermon on the Mount. (5) When, in Romans xiii. 7, the apostle says, "Render therefore to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute," etc., it is difficult to avoid the thought that St. Paul had heard of the remarkable answer which our Lord gave to the Herodians: "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's." (6) When, in 1 Timothy v. 18, St. Paul quotes as "Scripture" the words, "The labourer is worthy of his hire," it is exceedingly probable that he alludes to the words of Jesus which we now possess in Luke x. 7.

But perhaps the most striking proof of St. Paul's familiarity with the words of Jesus is to be found in 1 Corinthians vii. 12 and 25, where the apostle undertakes the proverbially difficult task of "establishing a negative." When St. Paul says, "To the rest speak I, *not* the Lord," and, "Concerning virgins, I have no commandment of the Lord, but give my own judgment," it is clear that he not only knew what our Lord had said, but knew what He had *not* said. He knew that our Lord had made no public utterance as to what a married Christian should do who had an unbelieving partner, and that in the course of our Lord's ministry the case of "virgins" had not come before Him; and precisely in accordance with this, our present Gospels, we need not say, are totally silent on both subjects.

III. Our third question, Is there any evidence that our Lord's discourses existed in St. Paul's day in a written form? is often answered in the negative: the reason assigned being that our present Gospels were not written

when St. Paul wrote his Epistles, unless it be those which he wrote during his imprisonment. This reason is however quite inconclusive, as may be seen from a thoughtful perusal of the first few verses of the Gospel of St. Luke. This proœmium, along with the rest of the Gospel, was written, in all probability, during the two years in which St. Paul was imprisoned at Cæsarea, A.D. 58–60. At that time, St. Luke says that *many* had “undertaken to draw up a narrative as to the matters which had been fully established” among the Christians; and continues: “It seemed good to me also, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write them in consecutive order.” From this important passage it may fairly be inferred, that there were in existence written accounts of our Lord’s words and deeds before St. Luke’s Gospel was penned; that these accounts were fragmentary, not arranged into one complete whole; and that the task which St. Luke set himself was chiefly that of a compiler, arranging in consecutive order (*καθεξῆς*) the fragmentary accounts of our Lord’s words and deeds which had been sacredly committed to writing by those “who were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word.” We conclude then, that it is highly probable that St. Paul had in his possession some of these primitive evangelic fragments, which were used by St. Luke, and used also, we may add, by St. Matthew and St. Mark in the compilation of our present Gospels.

IV. We come now to the fourth question: In what language were these primitive evangelic fragments written? It has usually been taken for granted that they would be written in Greek. But the difficulties connected with this assumption are many and serious. The minute differences among the synoptists can hardly have arisen from capricious alterations introduced by each in copying from the same Greek exemplar. So improbable has this been felt

to be, that very many modern scholars, with Bishop Westcott at their head, have discarded the theory of a written protevangelium altogether, and prefer to explain the divergences in the synoptic Gospels by the theory of slightly variant *oral traditions*. The design of this paper is to re-invite the attention of scholars to the theory of protevangelic fragments, written by eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, written however not in Greek, but in the language of Palestine. And the question which the writer wishes to raise, and to which he would here attempt a partial solution, is this: *Are the differences in the three synoptic Gospels explicable to any considerable extent by the assumption that they are variant translations of a common Hebrew or Aramaic original?* The limits of this article will not allow us to pursue this interesting inquiry further than to attempt an answer to the question which stands at the head of the paper: *Was St. Paul acquainted with a Semitic Gospel?*

Our field of investigation is of course very limited. We have only been able to produce *six* cases which show verbal coincidences between the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles; but it must be admitted, as encouraging to the theory which we undertake to defend, that in *three* of the six instances the variation between St. Paul and the evangelist is capable of explanation on the hypothesis that they give a variant translation of a common original, written in the language of Palestine.

The first case which we would examine is the coincidence between 1 Thessalonians v. 1-8 and the discourse of our Lord foretelling His second advent, which is recorded in the three synoptical Gospels, and was delivered just before His passion. There are very few passages in the Gospels in which we have so many verbal coincidences in the three synoptists as in the discourse just referred to. St. Matthew and St. Mark agree almost word for word;

while St. Luke agrees with them in the main, but furnishes several additamenta, not found in the others. The most important of these portions is Luke xxi. 34-36, which is very properly printed by our Revisers as a separate paragraph. Now it is precisely this small section, found among the synoptists only in Luke, that presents such close affinities with 1 Thessalonians v. 1-8. The features of resemblance come out best by exhibiting the two passages in parallel columns :

*Luke xxi. 34-36.*

But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life,

And lest that day come on you (*ἐπιστῆ ἐφ' ὑμᾶς*) suddenly (*αἰφνίδιος*)

As a snare (*ὡς παγίς*):

For so it shall come upon all who dwell upon the face of all the earth. Watch therefore at every season, . . .

That ye may be able to escape (*ἐκφυγεῖν*) all these things which are coming to pass,

And to stand before the Son of man.

*1 Thessalonians v.*

Let us watch and be sober; for they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us who are of the day be sober.

Sudden (*αἰφνίδιος*) destruction cometh on them (*αὐτοῖς ἐπίστανται*),

As travail (*ὥσπερ ἡ ὠδίν*) upon a woman with child.

[Let us not sleep, as do *the rest*, but let us watch.]

And they (*i.e.* the rest) shall in no wise escape (*οὐ μὴ ἐκφύγῳσι*).

The points of coincidence are thus self-evident, with perhaps one exception; and it is on this I wish to fix attention. St. Luke says *ὡς παγίς*, "as a snare." St. Paul, *ὥσπερ ἡ ὠδίν*, "as travail." Now on the theory that Christ spoke Greek, and that His words were first of all written in Greek, this and similar discrepancies are simply inexplicable. But admit that the evangelic fragment in possession of both authors was written in Hebrew—or, if this be asking too much, admit that both were acquainted with

an oral tradition perpetuated in Hebrew or in Palestinian Aramaic—and the difficulty disappears. The Hebrew word for “snare” is **חֶבֶל**, for “travail” **חֶבֶל**. Thus the consonants are identical: and they are all that was written in those days, for Hebrew vowels are a comparatively **modern invention**. **Assume then that the original fragment** written by one who heard the Saviour speak was in the language of Palestine, and that it contained the word **כַּחֲבֵל**, which *might mean either* “as a snare,” or, “as travail,” that St. Luke translated it in the former way and St. Paul in the latter, and the discrepancy is at once explained.

As to which of the two more accurately conveys the thought of the Saviour, there can be no hesitancy in deciding in favour of the apostle. It was a matter of general belief among the Jews, being based on Daniel's prophecy of the malignant “little horn,” that immediately before the coming of the Christ in His glory there would be a terrible conflict between the powers of good and evil, somewhat akin to that described by St. Paul in 2 Thessalonians ii. This dread conflict was popularly known as **חֶבֶל־יְשׁוּעָה**, “the birth-pangs of the Messiah,” or **חֶבֶל־יְשׁוּעָה**, “the birth-pangs of the æon.” To this interpretation of Daniel's prophecy our Lord gave His sanction when He said, as is recorded Matthew xxiv. 8, Mark xiii. 8, *Τὰυτα ἀρχὴ ὠδινῶν*, which must be translated (the absence of both articles being, as usual, equivalent to the presence of both), “These things are the beginning of the birth-pangs.” No explanation of this singular expression was given; none was needed. The disciples were quite familiar with the popular anticipation; and so was the quondam rabbi, “Paul the Apostle.” He knew what was alluded to in the word **כַּחֲבֵל**, but did not leave the statement so bare as in our Gospels, amplifying it for his Gentile readers to the phrase *ὥσπερ ἡ ὠδὶν τῆ ἐν γαστρὶ ἐχούσῃ*; whereas St. Luke, the Gentile physician, who would seem to have been unfamiliar with the



significant term by which the Jews expressed the conflicts which should precede the Messianic glory, translated the כהבל of his evangelic fragment by the incomparably feebler word ὡς παγίς.

Our next illustration shall be the one which stands sixth in our list of verbal coincidences between the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles. In 1 Timothy v. 18 we read: "For the Scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his hire." This last clause agrees verbatim with Luke x. 7, and is found in the injunctions given by our Lord to the twelve apostles when He sent them forth to evangelize the cities of Judæa, and thus from our passage in Timothy two inferences may certainly be drawn:

1. That at the time when 1 Timothy was written, the words of Christ were regarded as, at least, of the same authority as the Old Testament; and

2. That the discourses of Jesus at *that* time had been committed to writing, otherwise the word "Scripture" would be inappropriate.

The words of Luke x. 7 occur in the parallel passage, Matthew x. 10; with one variation however. St. Luke says, ἀξίως γὰρ ὁ ἐργάτης τοῦ μισθοῦ αὐτοῦ, "For the labourer is worthy of his *hire*"; but St. Matthew says, "For the labourer is worthy of his *food*" (τῆς τροφῆς). It may be said that the difference is insignificant, and that the meaning is the same in both cases; but it is far more satisfactory to be able to point to a Hebrew word as probably used by the Saviour, which has both the meanings of St. Luke and St. Matthew. Such a word we have in צִידָה; which seems to have the same natural history as the words *viaticum* and ὀψώνιον; that is to say, means (1) *food*, or a relish of fish or game to be eaten with bread; and then (2) *wages*, in food or in money. We believe therefore that our Saviour used the word צִידָה, and that this word was

translated by St. Matthew τῆς τροφῆς and by St. Luke τοῦ μισθοῦ.

In passing, we may allude to a discrepancy between St. Matthew and St. Mark which occurs in their account of our Lord's words in sending forth the twelve apostles, and which is elucidated by our theory. St. Matthew gives the words of the Saviour thus: "Provide no gold, nor silver, . . . nor shoes, nor a staff" (μηδὲ ῥάβδον). St. Mark's words are: "He charged them that they should carry nothing for the journey, *except* a staff" (εἰ μὴ ῥάβδον—Mark vi. 7). Now if we retranslate these variant words into the language of Palestine in Christ's day we obtain for "nor" נֹלָה, for "*except*" נֹלֵן—a corruption of דִּן and נֹלָה, and thus equivalent to εἰ μὴ. Of course both words would be written without vowels at that time; so that the misreading, through illegibility or some other cause, of a single letter explains the difference.

Our last example shall be drawn from the description given by St. Luke and St. Paul of the last supper. In the fourfold account of this solemn event, it is well known that, in recording the words of the Saviour, St. Luke and St. Paul agree almost word for word; and, following a slightly variant tradition, there is a similar resemblance between St. Matthew and St. Mark. But in the midst of many verbal coincidences in the two first-named authors, we come upon a discrepancy almost startling, and which seems to admit of no satisfactory solution save the one advocated in this paper. The passages referred to are Luke xxii. 19 and 1 Corinthians xi. 24.

St. Luke says:

"This is My body, which is *given* for you:  
τοῦτό ἐστι τὸ σῶμά μου τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν διδόμενον."

St. Paul says:

"τοῦτό ἐστι τὸ σῶμά μου τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν κλώμενον:  
This is My body, which is *broken* for you."

On the assumption that both these words are *translations*, and not the words literally used by the Saviour, what words do they probably represent in the language used by our Lord? If, with the late Dr. Delitzsch, we assume that the language spoken by our Lord was Neo-Hebraic, then for τὸ διδόμενον, the most natural equivalent is הִנְתֵּן (Niphal participle of הִתֵּן with article). This is the word given by Dr. Delitzsch in his Hebrew New Testament. For τὸ κλώμενον the renowned Semitic scholar gives הִנְבֹּצֵעַ (Niphal participle of בִּצַע). The present writer would however, with the utmost deference, submit whether (apart altogether from the exigences of the present theory) a more suitable word is not to be found in הִנְתַּח (Niphal participle of נָתַח) or הִנְתַּח (passive participle Kal).<sup>1</sup> The word בִּצַע does, it is true, in biblical Hebrew mean to “cut in pieces,” “break,” “wound”; and once in the Targum of Onkelos (Leviticus ii. 6) it is used of breaking the cake of the “minchat,” but it is never used of sacrifice. Whereas נָתַח is the *technical Levitic term* for the cutting in pieces of a victim before it was laid upon the altar. For instance, Exodus xxix. 17, “Thou shalt cut-in-pieces (תִּנְתַּח) the ram, and wash its inwards, and its legs: and thou shalt burn the whole ram upon the altar.” [Read also Lev. i. 6, 12; vii. 20; 1 Kings xviii. 23, 33.] Now at the last supper, as our Lord was looking forward to His death, He most certainly considered that He was about to offer Himself as a sacrifice. His blood was about to be “shed for the remission of sins”; and, seeing in the broken pieces of the bread an emblem of His body, lying, as it were, in pieces (נִתְהַיֵּם) upon the altar of atonement, He says, “This is My body, which is sacrificially-broken for you.”

We venture therefore to maintain that if our Lord spoke

<sup>1</sup> The latter of these may be preferred by some, because the Niphal of this verb is not found in extant literature, whereas the occurrence of the noun הִתַּח, “a piece” or “section,” shows that the Kal was in use.

Ἑβραϊστί, the word which He would use to show the comparison between the broken bread lying on the platter and His body lying on the altar of sacrifice was not עַצְמוֹתַי, but פָּתְלוֹתַי. Of course we are quite aware that the Revised Version, in its unflinching allegiance to the first readings of ABCN, omits the word κλώμενον altogether, and gives us the bald reading, "This is My body, *which is for you.*" But this is one of the cases in which, though MS. authority may silence, it cannot convince. No one whose critical faculty is not benumbed by years of mute submissiveness to diplomatic evidence, can look on these two lines,

τοῦτό ἐστι τὸ σῶμά μου τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν διδόμενον,  
τοῦτό ἐστι τὸ σῶμά μου τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, . . .

without feeling certain that a word has gone from the second line which once stood there. Many scholars of repute adopt this view. Among the Germans one may cite De Wette and Hofmann, and among our own divines Dr. T. C. Edwards and Dr. Maclaren. The reasons given by Dr. Edwards in his most excellent *Commentary on First Corinthians*, for the retention of the word κλώμενον seem to us thoroughly conclusive. They are three. (1) The expression: "This is My body, *which is for you,*" τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, is very harsh, perhaps unexampled. (2) Breaking the body was essential to the sacrifice. (3) Its omission by the copyists may be accounted for, on the supposition that they suspected a contradiction between this passage and John xix. 36: "A bone of Him shall not be broken." May we be acquitted of a *circulus in probando* if we give, as a fourth reason for the retention of the word κλώμενον, that by assuming, in accordance with the testimony of early Church Fathers, that the Gospel was originally written in the language of Palestine, we are able to explain the occurrence of τὸ διδόμενον in St. Luke's Gospel? We think that here again St. Paul has preserved the word literally used by our

Lord; but, as the incident was known to St. Luke only in a Hebrew exemplar, he mistook or misread the rare word הנתח for הנתן.

As to the vexed question, What *was* the language spoken by Christ? and the similar, or perhaps identical, question, In what language were the protevangelic fragments written? we do not here and now pronounce an opinion. We purposely chose the word "Semitic" to avoid such a pronouncement. אלא is a Chaldee or Aramaic word. נתח, on the other hand, is a Hebrew word, and so is צירח. But a study of the literature nearest the times of Christ convinces one that the language spoken was a sort of amalgam—very composite in its character. The Chaldee Targum contains numbers of Hebrew words; and therefore from the examination of the narrow area of instances which have come under our notice, it would be very hazardous to arrive at a decision. It is probable that the Targum of Onkelos and the Chaldee text of Tobit as edited by Mr. Neubauer are our closest surviving representatives of the Urevangelium. At all events, if the hypothesis of this paper has been established, the clue for the solution of this vexed question is in our hands, and that dialect which best explains the verbal discrepancies in the synoptists must be voted the original one in which the Gospel was first written.

J. T. MARSHALL.