

# **Evidence from History and the Gospels that Jesus Spoke Greek**

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The evidence is as yet inconclusive as to what language Jesus would have normally spoken to the Jewish crowds or to his disciples. However, for nearly the last century, “it has become practically a generally accepted tradition that the mother tongue of Jesus, the language he knew best and therefore usually spoke, was Aramaic.”<sup>1</sup> This is mainly due to the conclusions of Dalman,<sup>2</sup> “who stated that, though Jesus may have known Hebrew, and probably spoke Greek, he certainly taught in Aramaic.”<sup>3</sup> Some New Testament scholars have even gone as far as to say that “Jesus only spoke in Aramaic.”<sup>4</sup> Based on more recent historical research and linguistic data, the purpose of this paper is to show that Jesus spoke Greek, had the linguistic ability to teach in Greek, and at times may indeed have taught in Greek. There may, in fact, exist instances recorded in the Gospels where Jesus conversed and possibly taught in Greek. After this fact is established, this paper will call for a more serious consideration of the implications of this possibility by New Testament scholars and highlight the need for more research in this area.

This paper will focus on the Biblical text from both an historical and literary perspective. First of all, it will give a brief overview of what is known historically of the languages spoken in first-century Palestine. This will serve to establish the scope of Jesus’ linguistic possibilities and then to determine what languages Jesus probably spoke. It will next give an analysis of the words of Jesus that are recorded in the Gospels, particularly the occurrences of Aramaic words in the Gospel of Mark, in order to further determine what languages Jesus spoke. Lastly, it will examine a particular case study from a Gospel pericope in which it seems most probable that we can ascertain the very Greek words that Jesus spoke.

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<sup>1</sup> J. N. Sevenster, *Do You Know Greek? How much Greek could the first Jewish Christian have known?* Translated by J. de Bruin (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1968), 33.

<sup>2</sup> See G. Dalman, *Jesus-Jeshua: Studies in the Gospels* (trans. P.P. Levertoff; London, SPCK 1929).

<sup>3</sup> Stanley E. Porter, “Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?” *Tyndale Bulletin*, 44 (1993), 199.

<sup>4</sup> G. R. Selby, *Jesus, Aramaic & Greek* (Doncaster, England: The Brynmill Press Ltd, 1989), 4; (Referring to J.A.T. Robinson, “Can We Trust the New Testament”, Oxford, 1977, pg. 31).

## Limitations and Assumptions

Because the majority of scholars have previously made the assumption that Jesus normally taught in Aramaic, there has been much research and numerous volumes written over the last century analyzing the Aramaic statements of Jesus in order to ascertain what type of Aramaic Jesus actually spoke. Furthermore, since the time of Dalman, many scholars have operated under the assumption that “the ‘Hebrew’-speaking Jews of Palestine actually spoke Aramaic, and not Hebrew. Hence it is assumed that, wherever mention is made of the Hebrew language ... in the New Testament ..., Aramaic is what is actually meant.”<sup>5</sup> But even this can no longer remain uncontested. It appears from more recent archeological and linguistic evidence that “in Jesus’ day Hebrew occupied a more important position than was formerly thought.”<sup>6</sup> Various scholars have concentrated on this topic so that they would understand how to most properly take up the task of trying to get back to the actual words of Jesus by ‘retro-translating’ from Greek into the appropriate dialect of Aramaic or Hebrew. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has shed much light on this area of study. However, because this paper is contending for the role of Greek in Jesus’ ministry, it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss what dialect of Aramaic or Hebrew that Jesus might also have spoken.

Furthermore, due to this assumption that Jesus only taught in Aramaic, “since the late nineteenth century ... scholars have argued for the existence of Aramaic sources for the Gospels, and even in extreme cases for Aramaic originals for the Gospels themselves.”<sup>7</sup> Nigel Turner, a reputed Greek linguist, says that stylistic evidence suggests that it is “too extreme” to think that

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<sup>5</sup> J. N. Sevenster, 34; (Referring to G. Dalman, *Die Worte Jesu*, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1930, p. 1).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>7</sup> Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight, eds., “Languages of Palestine,” *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 443.

the “gospels were written at first in Palestinian Aramaic.”<sup>8</sup> I agree with Turner and others that although “the probability that Aramaic or Hebrew sources for the teaching of Jesus did exist at an earlier stage cannot be excluded,” it seems more probable that the Gospels themselves were written in “a kind of Greek which was inoculated with Semitic syntax and style.”<sup>9</sup> Whether or not there existed earlier oral or written sources from which the current Gospels were written, I concur with the “scholarly consensus”,<sup>10</sup> and it is the assumption in this paper, that the Gospels which we currently possess were originally composed in Greek and are not literalistic translations from an Aramaic or Hebrew original. “The most that can safely be said is that an Aramaic sayings-source or sayings-translation lies behind the synoptic gospels.”<sup>11</sup> It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the current scholarship or give an historical outline regarding possible Aramaic sources for the Gospels.<sup>12</sup>

In the last couple centuries there has also been much research done regarding the type of Greek that was spoken in ancient Palestine. Even more pages have been written regarding the kind of Greek that was used in writing the New Testament. This paper will not discuss the dialect or kind of Greek Jesus and other ancient Palestinians would have spoken, nor the kind of Greek used to write the Gospels. Once the fact has been established that ancient Palestine was a bilingual or trilingual society, it seems intuitive that the Greek of the Gospels is one that will

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<sup>8</sup> Nigel Turner, *Style*, vol. 4 of *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, by J.H. Moulton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1976), 5.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>10</sup> Stanley E. Porter, “Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?”, 209.

<sup>11</sup> Nigel Turner, *Grammatical Insights into the NT*, (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1965) pp.174-88 ; reprinted in Stanley E. Porter, *The Language of the New Testament: Classic Essays* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 175-6.

<sup>12</sup> For more research on this matter see Nigel Turner, *Style*, vol. 4 of *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, by J.H. Moulton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1976), Chapter 2, “Sources Behind the Gospels”; and cf. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight, eds., “Languages of Palestine,” *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992) 443-4; in order to read the arguments supporting Aramaic sources for the Gospels, see Maurice Casey, *Aramaic Sources of Mark’s Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

have numerous incursions from the Aramaic language, which many Jewish people spoke as their primary language.

This paper also assumes the two-document (or four-document) hypothesis for the Synoptic Gospels with Mark being the first Gospel that was written.<sup>13</sup> This assumption fits in well with my thesis since it is Mark who uses the most Aramaic terms, which are analyzed below.

### **Languages Used in Ancient Palestine, Particularly in Galilee**

Before looking at linguistic data, it is important to consider the historical and sociological context of first-century Palestine in order to determine what languages were customarily spoken in that region. This will help determine the range of languages that first-century Palestinians spoke and thus the probable languages of Jesus. The presentation here will only be a brief survey of the conclusions drawn by the many thorough studies that have been done on this topic. It will be shown here that the evidence points to the fact that first-century Palestine was multilingual with at least Aramaic and Greek widely spoken. Some form of Hebrew possibly was vernacular, but it was surely a written language. Latin was “used primarily by the Romans in political and administrative matters.”<sup>14</sup>

The two languages pertinent to this discussion are Aramaic and Greek. Whether or not Jesus spoke Hebrew is not as germane to this topic. It is commonly recognized among most scholars that “it would seem that Aramaic was the best-known and most widely used language among Jews of all classes in Galilee and in Judea also, at least in the larger urban areas.”<sup>15</sup> However, at the same time it is recognized by many that “There is evidence that Greek was a

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight, 784-92.

<sup>14</sup> Stanley E. Porter, *The Language of the New Testament: Classic Essays* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 27.

<sup>15</sup> Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight, 439.

living tongue among first-century Jews even around Jerusalem.”<sup>16</sup> But significance of the widespread use of Greek has been so often overlooked in its bearing upon the question at hand. Therefore, the following discussion will highlight some of the evidence for Greek being a more widespread language in first-century Palestine than some scholars have recognized. It will be shown that Greek was not only the most common language among gentiles in the Roman Empire, but was a widespread language even among the Jewish nation.

It has been universally acknowledged by virtually everyone who has studied the matter that “Greek was the *lingua franca* of the Graeco-Roman world and the predominant language of the Roman Empire.”<sup>17</sup> Because it was the language of the Empire, it held a place of prestige in that it dominated the political, educational, and economic environment even of Palestine itself. “This means that there would have been cultural, social and especially linguistic pressure to learn Greek in order to communicate broadly within the social structure.”<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, evidence continues to increase regarding the strong influence of the Greek language and culture in lower Galilee, the region where Jesus grew up. Highlighting the evidence of Hellenistic influence in Galilee is the fact that Matthew refers to that region as “Galilee of the Gentiles.”<sup>19</sup> Jesus’ hometown, Nazareth, was located just four miles from the largest Galilean city, Sepphoris which was a Hellenistic-Roman city where the Hellenistic culture, not Judaism, was dominant.<sup>20</sup> This “Hellenistic culture, which implied the use of Greek, dominated every aspect of life and society.”<sup>21</sup> In summarizing the importance of this region as a trade route, surrounded by

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<sup>16</sup> Nigel Turner, *Style*, 8.

<sup>17</sup> Stanley E. Porter, “Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?”, 205.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>19</sup> Matt 4:15. Unless otherwise noted, the scripture verses contained herein are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., and are used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>20</sup> Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green and Marianne Meye Thompson, *Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 39.

<sup>21</sup> J. N. Sevenster, 96.

Hellenistic culture, the greatly respected Greek linguist Stanley Porter says, “it is not legitimate to think of Jesus as growing up in linguistic and cultural isolation. Nazareth was situated along a branch of and had a position overlooking one of the busiest trade routes in ancient Palestine, the Via Maris, which reached from Damascus to the Mediterranean.”<sup>22</sup> Thus New Testament historian H.C. Kee concludes, “This means that for Jesus to have conversed with inhabitants of cities in the Galilee, and especially the cities of the Decapolis and the Phoenician region, he would have had to have known Greek, certainly at the conversational level.”<sup>23</sup>

Besides recognizing the strong Hellenistic culture in this area, literary and epigraphic evidence is even stronger in showing the widespread knowledge of Greek throughout Palestine, including Galilee. In addition to the Greek inscriptions found on coinage from first-century Palestine, there have been numerous papyri and literary texts discovered in that area that have been written in Greek. Many of these documents were written not only by Greek-speaking gentiles, but also by Jews. The papyri of the Judean Desert include two Greek letters recording correspondence between the Jewish commander Bar Kokhba and his lieutenants. Even though this is from the second century, it does help to establish the fact that Greek was widely used even among Jews shortly after the time of Christ. Fitzmyer says, “at a time when the nationalist fever of the Jews must have been running high the leader of the revolt ... frankly prefers to write in Greek, or at least has to write in Greek.”<sup>24</sup>

As far as Jewish literature is concerned, there is also significant evidence of Jews in Palestine writing in Greek for Jewish audiences. For instance, the deuterocanonical form of Daniel has sections written in Greek and the two apocryphal books of 1 Esdras and 2 Maccabees

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<sup>22</sup> Stanley E. Porter, “Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?”, 211.

<sup>23</sup> H.C. Kee, “Early Christianity in the Galilee: Reassessing the Evidence from the Gospels”, in Levine (ed.), *Galilee in Late Antiquity*, 21; quoted in Stanley E. Porter, “Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?”, 212-213.

<sup>24</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “A Wandering Aramean: Collected Aramaic Essays.” (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979) pp. 29-56; quoted in Stanley E. Porter, *The Language of the New Testament: Classic Essays*, 143.

“are thought likely to have been composed in Greek in Palestine.”<sup>25</sup> Furthermore “there have been a number of Greek Old Testament fragments from the minor prophets found in the Marabba’at caves, probably from a late first century A.D. scroll.”<sup>26</sup>

There is also inscriptional evidence that confirms the significant and widespread use of Greek throughout Palestine, even in conjunction with Jewish religious practices. Greek inscriptions have been found on Jewish synagogues and even on Jewish sepulchral inscriptions. “The first impression one gains from these data is that Greek was the language of the great majority among the Jews in the Imperial period, probably of more than two-thirds of them.”<sup>27</sup> This same tendency for epitaphs to be composed in Greek is found also in Jerusalem, the most Semitic of cities. The only natural explanation for this phenomenon is that Greek was the language of their daily life.

With all this evidence at hand (only briefly outlined here), it seems clear that although Jesus spoke Aramaic and probably taught in Aramaic for much of his ministry, it is also fairly certain that Jesus spoke Greek and could have taught in Greek at certain times of his ministry. The great Greek linguist James H. Moulton says, “that Jesus Himself and the Apostles regularly used Aramaic is beyond question, but that Greek was also at command is almost equally certain.”<sup>28</sup> It would be safe to say that,

It is not possible to settle the various issues regarding the linguistic milieu of first-century Palestine, as Fitzmyer rightly notes, except to say that the archaeological, linguistic and sociological evidence seems to indicate that the region was multilingual, including at least Aramaic and Greek in widespread and frequent use. . . . Therefore, the likelihood that Jesus, along with most Gentiles and Jews, was multilingual himself is strong.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Stanley E. Porter, “Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?”, 216.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> H.J. Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1960), 75-76; quoted in Stanley E. Porter, “Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?”, 221.

<sup>28</sup> J.H. Moulton, *Prolegomena*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., vol. 1 of *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, by J.H. Moulton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1908), 8.

<sup>29</sup> Stanley E. Porter, *The Language of the New Testament: Classic Essays*, 27.

As a summary of this evidence, Porter says, “This evidence clearly points to the presumption that Jesus’ productive bilingual capacity included the ability to speak and possibly to teach in Greek and, furthermore, that we may have several important contexts in which Jesus spoke Greek.”<sup>30</sup> Even Maurice Casey, a theologian from the University of Nottingham who has done much research in this area, and who disagrees with Porter’s and Turner’s conclusions about the possibility of Jesus actually teaching in Greek<sup>31</sup> concedes, “General evidence therefore dictates that Jesus was brought up to speak Aramaic, and makes us take seriously the possibility the he also knew Greek.”<sup>32</sup>

### **Jesus’ Aramaic Phrases Recorded in the Gospel of Mark**

Having established the fact that Jesus probably spoke Greek and had the ability to teach in Greek, it is important to then ask what is the significance of the Aramaic words used by Jesus in the Gospels? Some of them, such as *Beelzebul* and *Gehenna*, appear to be proper names and therefore have little bearing as to what language the speaker was using. Others, such as *Passover*, *Sabbath*, *Satan*, and *rabbi*, “must have been translated into Greek for centuries before Jesus was born”<sup>33</sup> and therefore would not technically be considered ‘speaking Aramaic’. For purposes of this study we will analyze the three times in the Gospel of Mark that Jesus uttered what seemed to clearly be an Aramaic verbal clause, namely those in Mark 5:41, 7:34, and 15:34.

In Mark 5:41 Jesus heals Jairus’ young daughter and says to her “*Talitha kum!*” Presumably Mark understood that some of his audience could only understand Greek and not Aramaic, so he then gives the Greek translation for these Aramaic words, namely, “Little girl, I say to you, get up!” In a format very similar to this, first giving the Aramaic and then a Greek

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<sup>30</sup> Stanley E. Porter, “Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?”, 205.

<sup>31</sup> Maurice Casey, *Aramaic Sources of Mark’s Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 63 ff.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>33</sup> G. R. Selby, 21.

translation, in Mark 7:34 Jesus heals a deaf person with the Aramaic word, “Ephphatha!” which Mark then translates for his readers as “Be opened!” Why did Mark record the Aramaic words that Jesus spoke and then give his readers the Greek translation? It is difficult to understand why Mark would have recorded the Aramaic words of Jesus if that were the language in which he normally spoke. If that were his customary language, why is it that Mark did not regularly record his statements in Aramaic? Or why did he bother to record these and not other statements? (Compare Mark 1:25, 1:41, 2:5, 4:39, and 5:8-9, which have similar linguistic structures, but do not record Aramaic transliterations.) It could indicate that this was not the normal language Jesus spoke, but he felt compelled to do so when addressing individuals who only spoke Aramaic.

Nigel Turner says,

As long ago as 1891 T.K. Abbott argued effectively in favour of Greek as the dominical language, and one of his best submissions was that if Jesus regularly taught in Aramaic it is difficult to explain why St Mark adopted the curious practice of reproducing only some, and not all, of his sayings in Aramaic. . . . One would think that the evangelist's reason for reproducing this particular selection of transliterations is that, contrary to his usual way, Jesus spoke in Aramaic on these occasions. The reason why is not so clear, but on some of them he may have been addressing individuals whose sole language was Aramaic.<sup>34</sup>

There is another instance in the Gospel of Mark where Jesus is recorded as speaking Aramaic followed with the Greek translation. Mark 15:34 records that just before Jesus died on the cross he “cried out with a loud voice, ‘ELOI, ELOI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?’ which is translated, ‘MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?’” The Gospel of Matthew also records these words and the subsequent translation.<sup>35</sup> In this instance it makes perfect sense that these gospel writers would record Jesus’ Aramaic words, because they go on to explain that some of the (presumably) non-Aramaic speaking bystanders thought that by the

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<sup>34</sup> Nigel Turner, *Grammatical Insights into the NT*; reprinted in Stanley E. Porter, *The Language of the New Testament: Classic Essays*, 182.

<sup>35</sup> Matt 27:46.

words “ELOI, ELOI”, Jesus was calling on Elijah. The words in Greek would have no rhyme with the word “Elijah.” Without recording the Aramaic words, the reader of Greek would be at a loss as to why these bystanders thought that Jesus was calling out to Elijah. Thus the gospel writers were forced to record the Aramaic words for their Greek speaking audience.

Based on these recorded sayings of Mark, we can say “that Jesus certainly spoke Aramaic on occasion.”<sup>36</sup> Although these instances do not prove whether Jesus did or did not speak Greek, the passages in 5:41 and 7:34 would be more easily explained by inferring that indeed Jesus normally spoke Greek and “the isolation of *talitha cum* and *ephphatha* and the like, as Aramaic phrases surviving in the Greek gospels, might then be explained as rare instance where patients of Jesus comprehended only Aramaic.”<sup>37</sup>

### **Was Jesus’ Conversation with Pontius Pilate Conducted in Greek?**

Furthermore, knowing that in all probability Jesus did indeed have the ability to converse in Greek, the question now remains as to whether or not there are any conversations recorded in the Gospels that indicate Jesus spoke in Greek. One situation that must be considered carefully is the record of Jesus’ trial before Pontius Pilate.<sup>38</sup> There are a number of factors that make this situation worth considering. First of all, Pontius Pilate was a Roman governor that treated Jewish customs with contempt<sup>39</sup> and it is therefore highly unlikely that he spoke any type of Semitic language. Second, there is no mention of an interpreter being present during all the interactions that took place between Jesus, Pilate, the Jewish leaders, and the crowds at this trial. Although this does not prove that there was not a translator involved, the fast pace of the narrative, recording conversation between Jesus and Pilate, Pilate and the Jewish leaders, and between

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<sup>36</sup> Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight, 442.

<sup>37</sup> Nigel Turner, *Style*, 9.

<sup>38</sup> Matt 27:11-14; Mark 15:2-5; Luke 23:2,3-5; John 18:29-38.

<sup>39</sup> Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight, 615.

Pilate and the crowds, argues against an intervening interpreter being present.<sup>40</sup> Assuming then that there was not an interpreter present, the only language that would have been common to all parties present would have been Greek. Therefore, it is most likely that Jesus spoke Greek to Pilate.

It is interesting to note that in this particular instance the Gospels may have recorded at least some of the actual Greek words of Jesus. This can be asserted based on the criteria of multiple attestation and of dissimilarity. This account is not only given in all three of the Synoptic Gospels but also in the Gospel of John. These appear to be two separate accounts of Jesus' trial since there is very little overlap in the details given or in words spoken, except in a few words spoken by Pilate and Jesus. The words that overlap occur in the question Pilate asks to Jesus and appear in all four Gospels, “Σὺ εἶ ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων;” (“Are you the king of the Jews?”)<sup>41</sup> Each one of the Gospels then record Jesus' response as “Σὺ λέγεις.” (“You say so.”) Whereas the Synoptic Gospels leave this simple answer standing as it is, the Gospel of John adds more words, developing his answer to make it clear that he indeed claims to be a king: “Σὺ λέγεις ὅτι βασιλεύς εἰμι” (“You say that I am a king”<sup>42</sup>). It is interesting to note that the clause, “Σὺ λέγεις” occurs in no other place in the Synoptic Gospels (whether standing alone nor as part of a larger clause), showing that these words are not some sort of redactional tendency of the synoptic tradition.

Thus it appears that multiple sources attest to this occurrence, both the Synoptic and Johannine traditions, and that this wording is completely dissimilar to other places in the Synoptic Gospels. Therefore it seems probable that not only do we have the words that Pilate

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. Stanley E. Porter, “Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?”, 225; and A. Roberts, *Greek: The Language of Christ and his Apostles* (London: Longmans, Green, 1888).

<sup>41</sup> Mark 15:2, Matt 27:11, Luke 23:3, and John 18:33.

<sup>42</sup> John 18:37.

spoke to Jesus, but also two words that may have been a part of Jesus' actual response in Greek. There are other incidences recorded in the Gospels that may also record Jesus' conversations in Greek including: Jesus' exchange with a Greek-speaking, Syrophenician woman (Mark 7:25-30; Matt 15:22-28) and Jesus' meeting with a gentile centurion (Matt 8:5-13; Luke 7:2-10). These instances need further consideration, but it is beyond the scope of this paper to do analysis on these and other such passages.

### **Observations and Conclusions**

Based on historical data in linguistics, sociology, literature and epigraphy, the likelihood is very high that Jesus was able to speak Greek and could have conducted some of his teaching in that language. It seems reasonable the Jesus would have taught the Jewish crowds in some dialect of Aramaic. However, with the current evidence concerning the widespread use of Greek in first-century Palestine as the prestigious language of the Roman Empire, we cannot rule out the possibility that Jesus also conducted some of his teaching in Greek. The fact that Jesus spoke Aramaic is attested by the occurrences of Aramaic quotes recorded in the Gospel of Mark. However, the existence of these occurrences can more easily be understood if we assume the author was recording the Aramaic words as a language different from the one that Jesus normally spoke.

Furthermore, other than the few times mentioned when the Gospel writers specifically mention phrases in Aramaic and then translate into Greek, it is interesting to note that they never reveal what language Jesus was using. This could be because they expected their readers to know what language was being spoken, whether Aramaic or Greek. It could also be explained if we assume that they were recording their message in the same language in which Jesus spoke, Greek. If, however, they were recording their story in Greek, knowing that Jesus spoke most of

his message in Aramaic, then we must draw the conclusion that they did not feel it crucial for their reader to know what his original language was, nor what his original words were. If they felt that it was the message about Jesus and not his *ipsissima verba* that were important, or if indeed in recording his sayings in Greek they were recording some of his original words, we must ask the question as to whether modern scholarship been searching in the wrong area by trying to get back to the ‘Aramaic sources’ behind the Gospels.

It seems that the possibility that Jesus spoke and taught in Greek needs to be considered more seriously as the foundation for further research instead of hanging on too tightly to century old assumptions. New Testament scholars working in this arena might do well to pay heed to Stanley Porter when he says,

it seems to me that the evidence regarding what is known about the use of Greek in ancient Palestine, including the cosmopolitan Hellenistic character of lower Galilee, the epigraphic and literary evidence, including coins, papyri, literary writers, inscriptions and funerary texts, but most of all several significant contexts in the Gospels, all points in one direction: whereas it is not always known how much and on which occasions Jesus spoke Greek, it is virtually certain that he used Greek at various times in his itinerant ministry. ... This says nothing about the overall linguistic competence of Jesus, nor do we know the frequency with which he used the languages at his disposal. But this conclusion at least opens up the possibility of further exploration of this topic, since it must be recognized that this conclusion has a solid foundation and cannot be ruled out on the basis of presupposition alone.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Stanley E. Porter, “Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?”, 235.

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