CHAPTER 1

Did Jesus and His Disciples Speak Greek?

What languages were spoken in first-century Palestine? Did Jesus and his disciples speak and teach in Greek? If so, do we have in the NT historical preservations of their actual communication? These questions have generated a rich debate through the years. It has been the general consensus among scholars that in order to recover the real Jesus of history it is necessary to uncover the Aramaic behind the Greek. For example, Maurice Casey makes this statement:

> If therefore we wish to recover the Jesus of History, we must see whether we can reconstruct his sayings, and the earliest accounts of his doings, in their original Aramaic. This should help us to understand him within his own cultural background.[1]

Greater recognition, however, should be given to the fact that many languages were current in Palestine during the time of Jesus. While it is generally agreed that Aramaic and Hebrew were key languages of the period, it is my purpose to demonstrate the widespread use of Greek and to argue that Jesus not only spoke Greek but also taught in Greek. Consequently, the Gospels may contain the very words that Jesus spoke instead of translations into Greek of Jesus' original words in Aramaic.[2]

1. Casey, *Aramaic Sources*, 1.

2. Wise notes that since the late nineteenth century scholars have held two basic assumptions regarding the influence of Aramaic upon the NT. First, scholars have assumed that Jesus spoke only in Aramaic. Second, they have also assumed that since Jesus spoke only in Aramaic his disciples preserved a record of sayings in Aramaic. See Wise, "Languages of Palestine," 434–44. This record or source is often identified in Synoptic studies as "Q," used by both Matthew and Luke (but not by Mark) in the

Joseph Fitzmyer argues that there are three important stages in the gospel tradition. First, stage one refers to the *Aramaic period* of the actual ministry and teachings of Jesus (1–33 CE), a period before the Gospels were written. Second, stage two represents the *Apostolic period* when the disciples and apostles taught and preached about the words and deeds of Jesus (33–66 CE). Third, stage three (66–95 CE) represents the canonical *Gospel period* reflecting a development of Greek writing. Fitzmyer's point is to remind readers not to confuse later Greek tradition with the early Aramaic of stage one. To do so is to "fall into the danger of fundamentalism."[3]

I find Fitzmyer's stages of gospel tradition unconvincing. They may reveal a bias toward a history-of-religions approach by incorrectly presupposing that Aramaic was the dominant language of Palestine and that the Greek compositions of the Gospels represent an advancement (stage three) in gospel tradition. If Jesus did indeed speak Greek, then we may have "direct access to the original utterances of our Lord and not only to a translation of them."[4] Consequently, much more than just a few Aramaic words and expressions can be connected to the Jesus of history. Porter's observation is therefore insightful:

> 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

composition of their respective gospels. Scholars like C. H. Weisse (1838), G. H. A. Ewald (1848), H. J. Holzman (1863), Sir John C. Hawkins (1899), and B. H. Streeter (1924) were early proponents of the existence of "Q." See Stein, *Synoptic Gospels*, 97–123; see also Stein, "Synoptic Problem," 784–92, and Michaels, "Apostolic Fathers," 203–13. Turner observed, "If Greek was understood well enough in Palestine to warrant issuing the Gospels in that language, it is strange that Palestinians who later became Christians needed to have their Scriptures in a Palestinian Aramaic version, the 'Palestinian-Syriac' which was provided by Byzantine emperors of the Christianized Palestinians." See Turner, *Style*, 5–10. Additionally, what drives the assumption that Aramaic lies behind the Greek, especially in regard to the Gospel of Matthew, is the statement by Papias (second century CE) preserved by Eusebius stating that "Matthew collected the oracles in the Hebrew language, and each interpreted them as best he could" (*Hist. eccl.* 3.39.15). Lamsa argues that the entire NT is dependent upon Aramaic sources (*New Testament Origin*). Scholars like Torrey (*The Four Gospels*), Black ("Recovery," 305–13, and *Aramaic Approach*), Butler (*Originality*), and Parker (*Gospel*) argue for a more modest position of confining Aramaic dependency to the Gospels. Rife asserts that in actuality "Matthew shows less evidence of being a translation from a Semitic original than does Mark." See Rife, "Greek Language," 571.

3. Fitzmyer, "Did Jesus Speak Greek?," 58–77.
4. Argyle, "Did Jesus Speak Greek?," 92–93.

> use. . . . Therefore, the likelihood that Jesus, along with most Gentiles and Jews, was multilingual himself is strong.[5]

A GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE LANGUAGES OF PALESTINE IN THE FIRST CENTURY CE

There is no doubt that Jesus spoke Aramaic. Jesus would have spoken a form of Middle Aramaic called Palestinian Aramaic. Fitzmyer indicates that there were five dialects of Middle Aramaic: (1) Palestinian, (2) Nabatean (around Petra in modern Jordan), (3) Palmyrene (central Syria), (4) Hatran (eastern Syria and Iraq), and (5) Syriac (northern Syria and southern Turkey).[6] Prior to 1947 CE, the date when the DSS were discovered, Palestinian Aramaic was supported only by a meager number of inscriptions on tombstones and ossuaries. Consequently, Gustaf Dalman argued that though Jesus may have known Hebrew and more than likely spoke Greek, he nonetheless certainly taught in Aramaic.[7]

However, since 1947 CE, many literary texts have been discovered that shed light on the dialect of Aramaic spoken by Palestinian Jews prior to and contemporaneous with Jesus.[8] The DSS reveal that Aramaic may have been the dominant language,[9] but the evidence reveals that it was not the only language spoken.[10] Therefore one cannot conclusively argue that Jesus spoke *only* Aramaic.[11] Palestine was multilingual in the first and second

5. Porter, *Language*, 27.

6. Fitzmyer, "The Phases of the Aramaic Language," 57–84.

7. This observation is from Porter, "Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?," 199, who relied upon the work of Dalman, *Jesus–Jeshua*.

8. Interestingly, Greek documents were also found at Qumran. Millard states that "while these Greek texts are very much in the minority among the Hebrew and Aramaic scrolls, they indicate an awareness of Greek and, presumably, the presence of people who could read them, even if they were not copied in the Qumran region but had been brought into the country from outside." Millard, *Reading and Writing*, 113.

9. Smelik observes that "Aramaic is widely held to have been the vernacular most commonly used by Jews throughout the Roman period. That Aramaic was widespread in Hellenistic and Roman Palestine seemed obvious to scholars even before the Qumran discoveries because of the Aramaic texts, quotations, loanwords, and names referred to above." See Smelik, "Languages," 126. Wise also states 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" ("Languages of Palestine," 439).

10. "Given modern analogies, it is likely that Palestine in Jesus' day was a welter of dialects and languages, many of which have left no written record at all" (ibid., 434).

11. Selby, *Jesus*, 4. Sevenster writes, "it has become practically a generally accepted tradition that the mother tongue of Jesus, the language he knew best and therefore

centuries CE.[12] Hebrew was the language employed by the Essenes who settled at Qumran (adjacent to the caves where the DSS were found) in order to preserve the sacred Law (i.e., the Torah) of the Jews.[13] Hebrew by this time had become the language associated with temple rituals and worship in synagogues where the Law and Prophets (the Torah and the *Nevi'im*) were read. The majority of the Jews no longer understood Hebrew.[14]

Aramaic, the sister language of Hebrew, was by necessity learned by Jews in Babylonian captivity (sixth century BCE) because it was the *lingua franca* of the empire.[15] Fitzmyer stated that "the use of Hebrew does not seem to have been widespread" as a spoken language after the Jews returned home.[16] Hebrew was customarily translated orally into Aramaic by a person called the *meturgeman* ("translator"). These translations from Hebrew were eventually written in Aramaic and were called *targumim* (singular, *targum*).[17]

Scholars have argued since the late nineteenth century that the sources behind the Gospels were Aramaic and that there might have been Aramaic

usually spoke, was Aramaic." See Sevenster, *Do You Know Greek?*, 33.

12. This chapter does not give an overview of Latin because it seems to have been "used primarily by the Romans in political and administrative matters." See Porter, *Language*, 27.

13. Opinions among scholars vary as to the identity of those who authored the DSS. In addition to the Essenes, connections have also been made to both Pharisaic and Sadducean sects. See Buchanan, "Essenes," 152.

14. There is the belief, however, from more recent evidence that Hebrew was not as scarce among the spoken languages as many scholars had previously argued. See Sevenster, *Do You Know Greek?*, 34. However, Dalman argued that "Aramaic became the language of the Jews to such an extent that the Gospel of St John as well as Josephus found it possible to designate such Aramaic words as *beza'ta, golgolta, gabbeta, asarta, rabbuni* . . . as Hebrew." See Dalman, *Jesus—Jeshua*, 15.

15. "[A]lthough Imperial Aramaic was the *lingua franca* and served for many official purposes, the Jews continued to use Hebrew in connection with the government and Temple." See Wise, "Languages of Palestine," 435. Dalman noted that "the spread of Aramaic in the originally Hebrew Palestine must already have begun in the year 721 B.C., when Samaria was peopled by Mesopotamian colonists. Through the influence of the Babylonian and, later, the Persian Governments it continued to spread: finally reaching Southern Palestine, when the leading classes were deported from there and supplanted by the alien element" (*Jesus—Jeshua,* 9).

16. Fitzmyer, "Did Jesus Speak Greek?," 58; see also Emerton, "Vernacular Hebrew," 1–23. It is the assumption of many scholars 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." See Sevenster, *Do You Know Greek?*, 34.

17. Three *targumim* were discovered among the DSS—the *targum* of Job from cave 11 and the *targumim* of Leviticus and Job from cave 4.

originals of the Gospels themselves.[18] Nigel Turner, however, suggested that though Aramaic might lie behind the Gospels, it is more likely that they were composed in Greek, mimicking in many ways a Semitic syntax and style.[19]

> Since the quality of New Testament Greek is decidedly Semitic in varying degrees, there may well have been a spoken language in common use among these trilingual Jews which would render superfluous the hypothesis of source-translation as an explanation of certain phenomena in New Testament Greek.[20]

Therefore, what we may have in the NT is a hybrid *Palestinian* Greek containing occasional Aramaic words and Semitic overtones.

Greek was widespread and was spoken by even the Romans and the Jews. Most scholars have recognized that "Greek was the *lingua franca* of the Greco-Roman world and the predominant language of the Roman Empire."[21] Consequently, as the Jews were compelled to learn Aramaic during captivity and the years following it, they were similarly pressured "to learn Greek in order to communicate broadly within the social structure" of their larger communities.[22]

Further evidence of the dominance of Greek among Jews is found in rabbinic sources that contain provisions for those who did not speak Hebrew. For example, the Mishnah[23] allows the following accommodation regarding the recitation of certain passages of Scripture:

> These are said in any language: (1) the pericope of the accused wife [Num 5:19–22], and (2) the confession of the tithe [Deut 26:13–15], and (3) the recital of the *Shema*, [Deut 6:4–9], and (4) the Prayer, (5) the oath of testimony, and (6) the oath

18. Wise, "Languages of Palestine," 443.

19. Turner, *Style*, 5–10.

20. Ibid., 7.

21. Porter, "Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?," 205.

22. Ibid., 209. Different forms of a language develop as communities assimilate to cultures and languages. *Diglossia* is a process by which a language develops into forms—a classical or high form and a rudimentary or lower form. The high form becomes the language of literature and the low form is the vehicle of everyday communication. This phenomenon is also referred to as "code switching." It is my contention that the lower form of *koinē* Greek contained a Palestinian dialect that included Aramaic words and expressions. See also Wise, "Languages of Palestine," 434.

23. The Mishnah is a compilation of sixty-two tractates of rabbinical teaching or "philosophical law code" that addresses various theoretical and practical topics. It was produced around 200 CE, though much of the content refers to the oral teachings of famous rabbis of an earlier time. See Neusner, *Rabbinic Literature*, 97–128.

> concerning a bailment. And these are said [only] in the Holy Language: (1) the verses of the firstfruits [Deut 26:3–10], (2) the rite of *halisah* [Deut 25:7, 9], (3) blessings and curses [Deut 27:15–26], (4) the blessing of the priests [Num 6:24–26], (5) the blessing of a high priest [on the Day of Atonement], (6) the pericope of the king [Deut 17:14–20]; (7) the pericope of the heifer whose neck is to be broken [Deut 21:7f.], and (8) [the message of] the anointed for battle when he speaks to the people [Deut 20:2–7] (*m. Sot.* 7:1, 2).[24]

Additionally, other rabbinic writings contain specific instruction regarding the recitation of Deut 26:1–11:

> There is a provision here for "responding," and elsewhere there is an equivalent provision [at Deut 27:14]. Just as "responding" at that other passage requires use of the Holy Language, so "responding" stated here requires use of the Holy Language. In this connection sages have said, "In earlier times whoever knew how to recite [in Hebrew] would make the recitation, and whoever did not know how to recite—they would recite in his behalf. Consequently people refrained from bringing first fruits [out of shame]. Sages made the rule that [priests] would recite in behalf of both those who knew how to make the recitation as well as those who did not know how to make the recitation. They ruled upon the verse of Scripture, "And you shall then respond" . . . maintain that "responding" is solely to what others say (*Sifre Deut.* 301).[25]

Although certain sections of Hebrew Scripture were only to be recited in the Holy Language, the fact remains that, by necessity, the religious leaders adapted in many respects to the cultural milieu of their people. Interestingly, according to another tractate of the Mishnah, a Torah scroll could also be written in Greek:

> There is no difference between sacred scrolls and phylacteries and *mezuzot* except that sacred scrolls may be written in any alphabet ["language"], while phylacteries and *mezuzot* are written only in square [Assyrian] letters. Rabban Simion b. Gamaliel says, "Also: in the case of sacred scrolls: they have been permitted to be written only in Greek" (*m. Meg.* 1:8).[26]

24. Neusner, *Mishnah*, 457.
25. Neusner, *Sifre to Deuteronomy*, 276.
26. Ibid., 318.

This ruling appears to be at odds with other stipulations, most notably the requirement of using the Hebrew square script for the writing of Torah scrolls:

> The Aramaic [passages contained in Scriptures] written in Hebrew, or a Hebrew [version] written in Aramaic or [passages written in archaic] Hebrew script do not impart uncleanness to hands. [Holy Scriptures] impart uncleanness to hands only if written in Assyrian characters, on parchment, and with ink (*m. Yad.* 4:5).[27]

Although the Mishnah was composed around 200 CE, the philosophical foundation and interpretation of the Torah found within it are based upon the interpretations and teachings of rabbis of an earlier period. This is highly significant in demonstrating the extent to which Greek had made deep advances into the very heart of Jewish culture.

Greek was the language of both secular and sacred literature. Outside of Palestine, Jews wrote regularly in Greek. One of the most prolific Jewish writers was Philo (ca. 20 BCE to 40 CE), a contemporary of Jesus.[28] In his book, *De Confusione linguarum*, Philo compares the tower of Babel to the one that Gideon swore to destroy during the period of the Judges (Judg 8:9) as the place where people turn from God:

> That name is in the Hebrew tongue (Εβραῖοι) Penuel, but in our own "turning from God." For the stronghold which was built through persuasiveness of argument was built solely for the purpose of diverting and deflecting the mind from honouring God (*Conf.* 126 §129 [Colson and Whitaker, LCL]).

Notice how Philo defines the meaning of the Hebrew name *Penuel* by giving the translation in his own tongue which of course is Greek. Philo's references to the "Hebrew tongue" and "our own" reveal how significantly Greek had eclipsed Hebrew as the common language among both the Jewish educated class and the Jewish common people outside of Palestine. It would seem that if the educated leaders of the Jewish population were already writing and speaking in Greek outside of Palestine, much of the Jewish population in Palestine must have been losing the ability to read, write, and speak in Hebrew.

Alexandria, Egypt, was known as the center of intellectualism and Hellenistic influence among the Jews. In this city, the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek (ca. 250 BCE), and the Septuagint (LXX), the "Bible"

27. Ibid., 1130; see also Smelik, "Languages," 125.

28. Millard, *Reading and Writing*, 112.

of the Jews, was produced. The textual evidence reveals that the Scripture more often quoted by NT writers was the LXX translation, not the Hebrew text. In fact, Everett Ferguson asserted the following:

> Much of the grammar, vocabulary, and thought-world of the New Testament finds its best parallel and illustration in the Septuagint. The distinctive religious meaning of many New Testament words (e.g., *ekklēsia, baptisma, presbyteros, psallō, cheirontonia*) is to be found not from etymology or classical usage but from the adaptations already made by Greek-speaking Jews, as known from the Septuagint, Philo, Josephus, the Apocrypha, and the Pseudepigrapha. On such theological and religious terms and on ways of things, the influence of the Septuagint on New Testament vocabulary and theology is extensive.[29]

The weight of the evidence appears to point to Greek as the spoken and written language of Gentiles *and* Jews without and within Palestine, as will be shown in the next section.

A GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE EVIDENCE OF GREEK IN PALESTINE

The penetration of Greek into Palestine had already begun before the conquests of Alexander the Great (fourth century BCE).[30] However, the hellenization of Palestine accelerated afterwards, especially under the Seleucid monarch Antiochus IV Epiphanes (second century BCE), and continued under Ptolemaic, Seleucid, Hasmonean, and Herodian kings. By the third and fourth centuries CE, Greek had practically replaced the Semitic languages of Palestine.[31]

The Edomite-Greek ostracon (277 BCE), found at Khirbet el-Kôm in 1971 CE, is the earliest Greek text discovered in Palestine.[32] This ostracon

29. Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, 437–38.

30. "[T]he Jews of Palestine had long known of the Greeks and perhaps some of them had had reason to learn some Greek, but the real advance followed upon Alexander." See Wise, "Languages of Palestine," 439.

31. Hengel provides a detailed analysis of the archaeological and literary data that demonstrates the advances of Hellenism in Palestine from the fourth century BCE to the first century CE. See Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*. See also Wilson, "Hellenistic Judaism," 477–82.

32. Khirbet el-Kôm, located between Hebron and Lachish, is the modern Arabic name of the village that rests upon an ancient site dating back to the Early Bronze Age. Ostraca numbers 1, 2, 4, and 5 are written in Aramaic, ostracon number 6 is Greek, and number 3 is a nine-lined bilingual ostracon. See Geraty, "Kôm, Khirbet El-," 99–100.

is a receipt dated "year 6," presumably the sixth year of Ptolemy II Philadelphus.[33] Although this discovery does indicate the presence of Greek, it does not indicate how widely Greek might have been used at that time. Louis Feldman states that "the bilingual character of the Edomite-Greek ostracon would appear to indicate that Greek was not the primary language of the inhabitants."[34] The purpose, however, in mentioning the ostracon is not to argue for Greek as a dominant language of the period but to illustrate the use of Greek in ordinary human affairs. Wise makes the following important observation:

> This ostracon, a bilingual Aramaic and Greek record of a loan, shows that Greek loanwords had already begun to invade Aramaic, even for mundane concepts and matters for which perfectly good words already existed in Aramaic.[35]

The presence of Greek in the ostracon provides evidence of Greek in common communication. Feldman further observes that "if we ask why Greek was employed at all, we may reply that perhaps it was intended to deter non-Jewish passers-by from molesting the graves."[36] Though Feldman sees no real evidence from this discovery to substantiate the common usage of Greek by the Jews of Judea, one could argue that efforts were made by Jews to communicate in Greek with their Greek neighbors, thus revealing the close contact that Jews had with the Greek language.

Much early Jewish literature was written in Greek by historians, poets, and military generals.[37] Justice of Tiberias, a bitter enemy of Flavius Josephus (ca. 37–100 CE), had received a Hellenistic education.[38] He was also a historian during the First Jewish Revolt against Rome (66–70 CE). Justice wrote the "History of the Jews against Vespasian."[39] In response to Justice, Josephus wrote his first version of the *Jewish War* in Aramaic and then the final form in Greek.[40] In another work called *Jewish Antiquities*, Josephus makes an interesting comment about the Greek language:

> My compatriots admit that in our Jewish learning I far excel them. But I labored hard to steep myself in Greek prose [and

33. Geraty, "Bilingual Ostracon," 55–61.
34. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile*, 14.
35. Wise, "Languages of Palestine," 439.
36. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile*, 14.
37. Fitzmyer, "Did Jesus Speak Greek?," 59; Holladay, *Fragments*.
38. Schreckenberg, "Josephus," 132–33.
39. Holladay, *Fragments*, 371–76.
40. Millard, *Reading and Writing*, 113.

> poetic learning], after having gained a knowledge of Greek grammar; but the constant use of my native tongue hindered my achieving precision in pronunciation. For our people do not welcome those who have mastered the speech of many nations or adorn their style with smoothness of diction, because they consider that such skill is not only common to ordinary freedmen, but that even slaves acquire it, if they so choose. Rather, they give credit for wisdom to those who acquire an exact knowledge of the Law and can interpret Holy Scriptures. Consequently, though many have laboriously undertaken this study, scarcely two or three have succeeded (in it) and reaped the fruit of their labors (*Ant.* 20.12.1 [Feldman, LCL]).

Although Josephus admits his own difficulty of mastering Greek, he does not imply that Greek was sparsely spoken. He had a command of the language even if spoken in a "broken form of Greek."[41] Josephus was also the interpreter for the Roman general Titus when he spoke to the Jewish populace near the end of the war. Such a post provided Josephus the opportunity to sharpen his abilities to speak on behalf of Roman authorities, write historical accounts of Roman activities, and serve as a translator. He described the strategy of Titus as follows:

> Blending active operations with advice, and aware that speech is often more effectual than arms, he not only personally exhorted them to seek salvation by the surrender of the city, already practically taken, but also delegated Josephus to parley with them in their native tongue, thinking that possibly they might yield to the expostulation of a fellow-countryman. Josephus, accordingly, went around the wall, and, endeavoring to keep out of range of missiles and yet within ear-shot, repeatedly implored them to spare themselves and the people, to spare their country and their temple, and not to display towards them greater indifference than was shown by aliens. (*J.W.* 5.9.2–3 §361–62 [Thackeray, LCL]).

Josephus therefore appears to have been overly modest about his Greek language skills.[42]

Inscriptions solely in Greek and bilingual inscriptions in Greek and Hebrew/Aramaic were used on ossuaries near the vicinity of Jerusalem. At one particular excavation at Mt. Olivet, twenty-nine ossuaries were found containing inscriptions in Hebrew (seven), Aramaic (eleven), and Greek

41. Fitzmyer, "Did Jesus Speak Greek?," 59.

42. Wise, "Languages of Palestine," 440.

(eleven). These ossuaries date before the Jewish war with the Romans (66–73 CE). Robert Gundry makes the following observation:

> One would think that in the presence of death a language of the heart would have been used, a language in which people habitually thought and spoke. Yet all three languages in question appear on the ossuary finds in roughly equal proportions.[43]

Evidence of this kind would appear to counter Matthew Black's assertion that the dominant linguistic setting of the first century was Aramaic:

> Greek was the speech of the educated "hellenized" classes and the medium of cultural and commercial intercourse between Jew and foreigner; Latin was the language of the army of occupation and, to judge from Latin borrowings in Aramaic, appears also to some extent to have served that purpose of commerce; Hebrew, the sacred tongue of the Jewish Scriptures, continued to provide the lettered Jew with an important means of literary expression and was cultivated as a spoken tongue in the learned coteries of the Rabbis; Aramaic was the language of the people of the land and, together with Hebrew, provided the chief literary medium of the Palestinian Jew of the first century; Josephus wrote his *Jewish War* in Aramaic and later translated it into Greek.[44]

Based upon the archaeological evidence, Black's assertion seems exaggerated. What we find is that all three languages—Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek—were commonly used in the first century. As Gundry notes, "We are not dealing with an either/or, but with a both/and."[45]

The longest Greek inscription is the Theodotus Inscription dating in the first half of the first century CE. The inscription reads as follows:[46]

> ΘΕΟΔΟΤΟΣ . ΟΥΕΤΤΕΝΟΥ . ΙΕΡΕΥΣ . ΚΑΙ
> ΑΡΧΙΣΥΝΑΓΩΓΟΣ . ΥΙΟΣ. ΑΡΧΙΣΥΝ[ΑΓΩ]–
> Γ[Ο]Υ . ΥΙΟΝΟΣ . ΑΡΧΙΣΥΝ[Α]ΓΩΓΟΥ . ΩΚΟ–
> ΔΟΜΗΣΕ . ΤΗΝ . ΣΥΝΑΓΩΓ[Η]Ν . ΕΙΣ . ΑΝ[ΑΓ]ΝΩ–
> Σ[Ι]Ν . ΝΟΜΟΥ . ΚΑΙ . ΕΙΣ . [Δ]ΙΔΑΧΗΝ . ΕΝΤΟΛΩΝ ΚΑΙ
> ΤΟΝ . ΞΕΝΩΝΑ . ΚΑ[Ι . ΤΑ] . ΔΩΜΑΤΑ . ΚΑΙ . ΤΑ. ΧΠΗ–

43. Gundry, "Language Milieu," 406; see also Hughes, "Languages Spoken by Jesus," 133.

44. Black, *Aramaic Approach*, 15–16; Hughes, "Languages Spoken by Jesus," 127–28.

45. Gundry, "Language Milieu," 405.

46. Dots have been added to the inscription to indicate word breaks, and hyphens have also been added to denote line breaks. See Hanson and Oakman, "Theodotus Inscription," lines 1–10.

Σ[Τ]ΗΡΙΑ . ΤΩΝ . ΥΔΑΤΩΝ . ΕΙΣ . ΚΑΤΑΛΥΜΑ . ΤΟΙ–
Σ . [Χ]ΠΗΖΟΥΣΙΝ . ΑΠΟ . ΤΗΣ . ΞΕ[Ν]ΗΣ . ΗΝ . ΕΘΕΜΕ–
Λ[ΙΩ]ΣΑΝ . ΟΙ . ΠΑΤΕΡΕΣ . [Α]ΥΤΟΥ . ΚΑΙ . ΟΙ . ΠΡΕ–
Σ[Β]ΥΤΕΡΟΙ . ΚΑΙ . ΣΙΜΩΝ[Ι]ΔΗΣ

> Theodotus, son of Vettenus, priest and synagogue ruler, son and grandson of a synagogue ruler, (re-)built the synagogue for reading the law and teaching the commandments, also the guest room and upstairs rooms and the water supplies as an inn for those from abroad in need, which his ancestors and the elders and Simonides founded.[47]

The importance of this inscription cannot easily be underestimated. The existence of an inscription of this kind in Greek indicates that Jewish leaders and synagogue attendees had accommodated themselves to, or had assimilated, the language of their Greek neighbors. The inscription may imply that the Jews who were Jesus' contemporaries were already using Greek in their everyday communication, further substantiating a multilingual presence in Palestine.

The period between the destruction of Jerusalem/temple in 70 CE and the Second Jewish Revolt (Bar-Kokhba revolt) in 135 CE has yielded many archaeological discoveries. Numerous Greek papyri have been unearthed during this period. The discoveries include letters, marriage contracts, legal documents, literary texts, and some undeciphered Greek shorthand.[48] One of the more fascinating discoveries is the Letter of Bar-Kokhba written in Greek to his lieutenants. The translation reads as follows:

> Sou[mai]os to Jonathe,
> (son of) Baianos, and Ma-
> [s]abbala, greetings!
> S[i]nce I have sent to
> You A[g]rippa, make
> H[ast]e to send me
> B[e]am[s] and citrons.
> And furnish th[em]
> For the [C]itron-celebration of the
> Jews; and do not do
> Otherwise. Not[w] (this) has been writ-
> Ten in Greek because
> a[de]sire has not be[en]

47. Albright, *Recent Discoveries*, 112; Thompson, *Bible and Archaeology*, 332; Millard, *Reading and Writing*, 110.

48. Fitzmyer, "Did Jesus Speak Greek?," 77.

> found to w[ri]te in Hebrew. De[s]patch
> him quickly
> fo[r t]he feast,
> an[d do no]t
> do otherwise.
> Soumaios.
> Farewell.[49]

Fitzmyer makes an insightful observation in regard to this letter:

> Thus, at a time when nationalist fever must have been running high among the Jews, the leader of the revolt—or someone close to him—frankly preferred to write in Greek. He did not find the *horma*, "impulse, desire," to write *hebraisti*.[50]

If Greek had not by this time emerged as the dominant language, one wonders why a Jewish nationalist would have written and perhaps would have spoken predominantly in Greek. Even if one argues that Aramaic is to be understood when the term Hebrew is employed, the point still remains that Greek had upstaged Aramaic by the first quarter of the second century CE.

The Herodian Temple Inscription found in 1935 outside the wall around Jerusalem's Old City near St. Stephen's Gate (the Lion's Gate) warns Gentiles in Greek that they must keep out. The nineteen-inch-high limestone fragment dates back to the time of Jesus. A complete version of the same inscription was found in the late nineteenth century CE. A translation of the full version reads as follows:

> Let no Gentile enter within the partition and barrier surrounding the Temple, and whosoever is caught shall be responsible for his subsequent death.[51]

The inscription confirms what Josephus wrote in his *Jewish War*:

> Upon [the partition wall of the Temple court] stood pillars, at equal distances from one another, declaring the law of purity, some in Greek, and some in Roman letters, that "no foreigners should go within that sanctuary." . . . (*J.W.* 5.5.2 §193–94 [Thackeray, LCL]).

These inscriptions are extremely valuable because they demonstrate the use of the Greek language by Jews to communicate with their Gentile neighbors; though in the above case, the communication was less than cordial.

49. Fitzmyer, *Wandering Aramean*, 36.
50. Fitzmyer, "Did Jesus Speak Greek?," 60.
51. Ibid., 61.