Foreword

It is a special privilege to be invited by Dr. G. Scott Gleaves to contribute a foreword to *Did Jesus Speak Greek? The Emerging Evidence of Greek Dominance in First-Century Palestine*. This topic is an engaging one for those who have an inquiring mind and who desire to dig deeper into the world of the New Testament. As I began considering what needed to be said, my mind kept returning again and again to the account of the crucifixion in John 19:20–22. John's account is the only place in the New Testament that informs the reader that the inscription placed on the cross where Jesus died was written in three languages: Hebrew (Aramaic), Latin, and Greek. The text is also the sole source that identifies Pilate as the author of the statement attached to the cross. The appearance of these languages in a public place at this specific time reveals the multilingual character of Roman Palestine. In addition, an inquiring mind may desire to understand how these languages intersect. Are they equally distributed among the population? Are they associated with certain geographical regions, ethnic and religious peculiarities, or national identities? Is there a particular language that may be dominant and therefore serve as a primary means of communication? Consider this analogy: If a traveler, fresh from a trip to the exact same area of the Middle East in 2015, left a statement in a travel diary that a large number of signs in what we today classify as modern Israel were written in Hebrew (Israeli), English, and Arabic, some were only in Hebrew and Arabic, and a number of others were only in Hebrew and English, what conclusions would one reach upon discovering such information in 4015? Additionally, if somehow that researcher also knew that only a tiny portion of the population back in 2015 were English-speaking, what inferences could be drawn?

At the time of Jesus and his disciples, the inhabitants of Palestine lived in a land where Latin was present only because the Romans were present and in control of the region. Few Jews spoke in Latin, except to speak of Caesar, Caesarea, a centurion, or a denarius. Hebrew was well-known primarily

to those who studied the Hebrew Scriptures. Aramaic was widely spoken by the native population, as is reflected in the New Testament, but Greek was the *lingua franca* of the Mediterranean world, appearing in a surprising number of places throughout Galilee, Samaria, Judea, and other neighboring territories. Though Aramaic was without question the native language of many who lived in first-century Palestine, was it the dominant or primary language of Jesus and his disciples? Dr. Gleaves argues that the historical and archaeological evidence (ossuaries, papyri, parchments, building and stele inscriptions, and inscribed pottery) may very well paint a different picture than the one presented by academia. Despite the fact that several important and learned scholars hold that Aramaic was overwhelmingly the language spoken in New Testament Palestine (with a few denying that Jesus spoke Greek at all), Dr. Gleaves argues his case from what the evidence reveals and therefore counters positions that may rely more upon tradition.

When Scott was in our doctoral program at Amridge University, he enrolled in a course called *Historical and Archaeological Research of the New Testament*. I encouraged him to do a thorough study—dealing with whether or not Jesus spoke Greek, and if so, to what extent. My plan was to show him that here was a fascinating and meaningful topic which could grow into a dissertation and possibly someday be worthy of publication. He obediently began the research, but with much less excitement than I had hoped. However, by the time he had completed a lengthy paper on the topic, he had become passionate about investigating the question in much greater detail. How excited I was when he jettisoned his original dissertation topic and energetically took up the present study. My plan had succeeded. I was blessed to function as the chair of his committee. I am convinced that the overall approach of Dr. Gleaves is unique. His reasoning is sound. His conclusions answer adequately the part played by the Greek language in the formation of the New Testament. He gives plausible reasons why the books of the Greek New Testament show signs of being original compositions rather than translations from Aramaic. He interacts with differing viewpoints as he builds a case for his own conclusions.

Scholars in the field of biblical studies need to read this work and carefully weigh its findings. This effort is one filled with long hours of hard work and is, in my opinion, one of the best academic achievements produced to this point by our students at Amridge University. The motive behind this work goes beyond a mere fulfillment of an academic requirement. Such is not the case with most of the dissertations I have read in my fifty-five years as a college and university professor. Many, no doubt, began as a means to an end, including my own at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, but happily became a labor of love that blessed and enhanced my own study. Yet my

dissertation and those of many others, however beneficial, fall short when compared to what Dr. Gleaves has accomplished.

The conclusions he puts forth, if correct, have far-reaching implications, but I must allow him to make his own case within the pages of this book and to permit the readers to judge the quality of his work for themselves. I am excited to recommend this work and obviously am convinced it will lead to a better understanding of the place of Greek in the world in which Jesus lived.

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