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# Is the Hebrew Matthew an Authentic Document?

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Among all of the texts of the Apostolic Scriptures or New Testament, today's broad Messianic movement has some significant struggles when it comes to the composition of the Gospel of Matthew. There are various reasons for this, perhaps including Matthew's length, the obvious connections and comparisons to be made between Matthew's message and Second Temple Judaism, but above all this surrounds the original language in which Matthew was written. There is an attestation from ancient Christian history, that there was likely some kind of Hebrew material involved in the composition of Matthew's Gospel (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.24.6; 3.39.16). This has not only led many of today's Messianic people, but also leaders and teachers, to conclude that the Gospel of Matthew was originally written in Hebrew **and** that there (presently) exists a Hebrew text of Matthew which is superior to the canonical Greek Matthew.

Sifting through the issue of the composition of the Gospel of Matthew, and some sort of Hebrew involvement concerning it—while two to three decades ago may have been an interesting philosophical exercise—has today become rather complicated. It is complicated on one level because of the intense amount of emotion and fervor demonstrated in support of an originally transcribed Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew, by both those in the independent Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement *and* those in more mainstream Messianic Judaism. It is complicated because there does not seem to be that much engagement, at all, with contemporary examiners of the canonical Greek Matthew, who are certainly familiar with the proposal that Matthew's Gospel was originally written in Hebrew, but who may not see it as historically and textually valid. And, there is an eclectic text circulating in much of the Messianic world called *The Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* (George Howard [Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995]), which many have accepted as some sort of originally rediscovered manuscript—when in fact it is a hypothetical document pieced together from a Jewish anti-missionary work from the Middle Ages. Furthermore, those few Messianics, who may question the validity of the presumed Hebrew Gospel of Matthew, can be unfairly dismissed via the guise that they are trying to attack the Hebraic and Jewish origins of our Messianic faith—and even

## Messianic Torah Helper

Hebrew language studies—when in reality they are simply trying to deal with the facts of history and Biblical composition.

This article will attempt to sort through some of the difficulty present in recent years by the Hebrew Gospel of Matthew. We will consider what has been said, generally, about the origins of Matthew's Gospel by some of today's Messianic teachers and leaders of note. We will evaluate some of the challenges that few Messianic people are aware of, regarding the statement of Papias in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*. We will critically examine George Howard's text *The Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, and whether what he has provided should be considered authentic or inauthentic. Most importantly, we will provide some alternative points of view regarding Matthew's composition and the Hebrew Gospel of Matthew question, which have not been raised frequently enough in the Biblical Studies of our Messianic faith community.

### What have Messianics said about the origins of Matthew's Gospel?

It is interesting, but while there has been a great deal of *verbal talk* pertaining to the origins of Matthew's Gospel, particularly among many Messianic Jewish congregational leaders and teachers—there has been very little *written* about this. Why is this the case? Perhaps it is because it is very easy to take a statement or two from ancient Christian writing, stir an audience, and then one's subsequent opinions about such statements get touted later as established fact. *Few, sadly, will bother to consider a second or third opinion.* Yet, there have been some things written down about the origins of Matthew's Gospel which we need to be aware of, as we sort through some of the psychology of remarks that continue to be made across the broad Messianic spectrum.

A rather general remark about the written origin of the Apostolic Scriptures is seen in the introduction to the Complete Jewish Bible by David H. Stern. He asserts, "there is good reason to think that several books of the New Testament either were written in Hebrew or Aramaic, or drew upon source materials in those languages; this case has been made by one scholar or another for all four Gospels, Acts, Revelation and several of the General Letters. Moreover, Sha'ul [Paul], whose letters were composed in Greek, clearly drew on his native Jewish and Hebraic thought-forms when he wrote."<sup>1</sup> No one in Biblical Studies should have any disagreement with Stern claiming that the authors of the New Testament drew upon Jewish and Hebraic thought forms, as they all lived within the context of Second Temple Judaism. Yet, whether texts such as the Gospels, Acts, Revelation, or General Epistles were originally *written* in Hebrew, can be contested.<sup>2</sup> One of the major sources of Hebrew material that undeniably sits behind the Apostolic Scriptures, is that of the Hebrew Tanach itself. Likewise, simply because these texts may demonstrate Hebraic and Jewish thought forms, does not at all necessitate a written Hebrew origin. There was an ancient style of Jewish Greek writing present in the broad First Century, which itself was influenced by the composition of the Greek Septuagint

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<sup>1</sup> David H. Stern, trans., *Complete Jewish Bible* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1998), xxxi.

<sup>2</sup> Consult the workbook *A Survey of the Apostolic Scriptures for the Practical Messianic* by J.K. McKee.

## Is the Hebrew Matthew an Authentic Document?

translation of the Tanach from the Hebrew.<sup>3</sup> Presumed written Hebrew origins of various New Testament books, could just as well have been Septuagint-style Jewish Greek.

The 2011 commentary *Matthew Presents Yeshua, King Messiah* by Barney Kasdan, sees its author making some demonstrable emotional appeal to the Gospel of Matthew apparently having been written in Hebrew. Kasdan says,

[There is] a significant historical point concerning the strong Jewish context of Matthew: There is a reference to Hebrew being the original language of the scroll. As the early church historian Eusebius notes, 'Matthew composed the oracles in the Hebrew language, and each one interpreted them as he was able' (*Ecclesiastical History*, III, xxxix, 16).

"While we have not found this Hebrew gospel account (yet), it is not surprising to Messianic Jews that Matthew as a Jew wrote to Jews in Hebrew!"<sup>4</sup>

Kasdan's remarks are fairly typical to what you are to expect at a Messianic Jewish congregation regarding the composition of the Gospel of Matthew. There is a quote made from Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, even though there is **no further engagement** by a writer like Kasdan with how various other examiners of Matthew have approached it—which is a bit unacceptable given Kasdan's place as a major Messianic Jewish leader whose commentary will circulate widely. Most problematic, though, is Kasdan's high emotional appeal: "it is not surprising to Messianic Jews that Matthew as a Jew wrote to Jews in Hebrew!" While there is no doubting that many First Century Jews could read and speak Hebrew—what about the vast numbers of Greek-speaking Diaspora Jews in the Mediterranean? It seems that these people have just been written off. And, Kasdan holds out some future hope that a Hebrew Gospel of Matthew will one day be discovered. He shares this dream along with many other of his colleagues.

A final view to recognize is seen in the brief introduction to Matthew (*Mattai*, מַטַּי) in *The Delitzsch Hebrew Gospels* version, which is an English translation of Franz Delitzsch's Nineteenth Century Hebrew translation of the Greek New Testament.<sup>5</sup> This introduction includes an abbreviated anthology of remarks from an early Messianic Jew, Yechiel Tzvi Lichtenstein (1831-1912):

"Mattai wrote his book (according to Papias and Clement of Alexandria and many others) in the Hebrew tongue mixed with Aramaic, which was customary then among the Jews, and the book was later translated into Greek....According to Papias, Mattia [sic] called his book *The Sayings of Yeshua*. While it is true that Mattai's book contains both sayings of Yeshua and stories of his deeds, the Hebrew word for 'sayings' (*divrei*, דִּבְרֵי) includes both words and deeds, unlike Greek. Apparently sometime later, the name was changed when they began to call his book *The Gospel of Mattai*."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Much of this is covered in R. Timothy McLay, *The Use of the Septuagint in New Testament Research* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Barney Kasdan, *Matthew Presents Yeshua, King Messiah: A Messianic Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Lederer Books, 2011), 3.

<sup>5</sup> Franz Delitzsch is most well known for being a major contributor to a series of Old Testament commentaries, along with Carl Friedrich Keil.

<sup>6</sup> Aaron Eby and Robert Morris, trans., et. al., *The Delitzsch Hebrew Gospels: A Hebrew/English Translation* (Marshfield, MO: Vine of David, 2011), xlvi.

## Messianic Torah Helper

While it is appreciable to know that Lichtenstein wrote a commentary on the New Testament in Hebrew, which will likely contain some interesting insights for many to consider—still, how many of today’s Messianic people will see what he says, and not even think to recognize that his remarks might be a bit dated to the Nineteenth Century? *Lichtenstein’s commentary is over a century old.* This means that there will not be an adequate triangulation of opinions and proposals from those in more contemporary Biblical Studies considered and weighed. Not enough Messianics reading a figure like Lichtenstein, in the Twenty-First Century, may be astute enough to consider this.

On the whole, today’s Messianic Jews who believe that the Gospel of Matthew was originally written in Hebrew will offer an appeal to Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History*, and then make an emotional argument in favor of Matthew being written in Hebrew. Not enough evaluation of some other views will be offered. And, while it is very easy on an empirical level to refute those who are hoping for a Hebrew Gospel of Matthew to be somehow discovered in or around the Land of Israel today—cutting through the human feelings is not at all very easy. Yet, precisely being more objective regarding the composition of Matthew’s Gospel is what is required.

### Papias’ Logia

One of the most widespread views among today’s New Testament scholars is that the author of Matthew incorporated previous material from the Gospel of Mark, as well as data taken from another source, in assembling his Gospel.<sup>7</sup> This main, secondary source could have been oral or written. Frequently, it is proposed that there was a document of notes or records on Yeshua’s ministry and teachings accessible, which in many scholastic works has been designated as “Q” (an abbreviation for *Quelle*, the German word for “source”). A two-source or two-document hypothesis for the composition of Matthew does account for how nearly ninety-percent of Mark is repeated in Matthew, with additional information incorporated and expanding the message. While Mark’s Gospel was written largely for a Greek and Roman audience that would have been more interested in the actions of Yeshua, Matthew’s Gospel was written largely for a Jewish audience that would have been most persuaded by His prophetic fulfillment and teachings.

There are various liberal examiners who question Matthew’s authorship, as the author does not identify himself by name in the Gospel. Greek copies of this Gospel started appearing with the words *kata Matthaion* (ΚΑΤΑ ΜΑΤΘΑΙΟΝ) around 125 C.E.<sup>8</sup> What we know about the authorship of this Gospel comes from later Christian tradition, which ascribes Matthean origin, but also begs some complicated questions about its composition. The Fourth Century historian Eusebius detailed, “Matthew also having first proclaimed the gospel in Hebrew, when on the point of going also to other nations, committed it to writing in his native tongue and thus supplied the want of his presence to them by his writings” (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.24.6).<sup>9</sup> The statement that receives the

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<sup>7</sup> The material in this section has been adapted from the workbook *A Survey of the Apostolic Scriptures for the Practical Messianic*.

<sup>8</sup> Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 43.

<sup>9</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea: *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. C.F. Cruse (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 89.

## Is the Hebrew Matthew an Authentic Document?

most attention among Matthean interpreters, though, appears a little later when Eusebius relays the words of the Second Century C.E. figure Papias, bishop of Hierapolis in Asia Minor:

**“Matthew composed his history [or, ‘Matthew compiled the *Sayings*’]<sup>10</sup> in the Hebrew dialect, and everyone translated it as he was able”** (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.16).<sup>11</sup>

This one statement by Papias, which appears to have been repeated by some of the other Church Fathers and made its way to Eusebius, has been interpreted in various ways—some ways being rather misleading. D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo advise examiners how these words are “notoriously difficult to translate,”<sup>12</sup> noting the different options for us:

“Matthew συνετάξετο (*synetaxeto*, ‘composed’? ‘compiled’? ‘arranged [in an orderly form]’?) τὰ λόγια (*ta logia*, ‘the sayings’? ‘the gospel’?) in Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ (*Hebraïdi dialektō*, ‘the Hebrew [Aramaic] language’? ‘Hebrew [Aramaic] style’?) and each ἡερμήνευσεν (*hērmēneusen*, ‘interpreted’? ‘translated’ ‘transmitted’?) them as best he could.”<sup>13</sup>

Controversy over the composition of Matthew’s Gospel ensues over what Papias meant by saying that Matthew either compiled or assembled *ta logia* (τὰ λόγια), as *logion* (λόγιον) is generally a Greek term for “sayings” or “oracles.”<sup>14</sup> Noted with the further description “in the Hebrew dialect,” *Hebraïdi dialektō*, there are four basic ways that Eusebius’ words can be viewed:

1. A complete Gospel text was written by Matthew in Hebrew or Aramaic<sup>15</sup>
2. Matthew put together notes of the sayings of Yeshua in Hebrew or Aramaic, possibly what scholars propose as being the Q document, later to be incorporated into our final and complete Greek Gospel
3. The description *Hebraïdi dialektō* is to be regarded as being a Jewish style of composition/writing
4. *Logia* could mean various proof texts from the Tanach Scriptures that support Yeshua’s Messiahship<sup>16</sup>

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Further on in Eusebius’ record, he describes how a Christian evangelistic figure named Pantanaeus made it to India, where he encountered “some who were acquainted with the Gospel of Matthew, to whom Bartholomew, one of the apostles, had preached and had left them the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew, which was also preserved until this time” (*Ecclesiastical History* 5.10.3; p 166).

<sup>10</sup> Eusebius: *The History of the Church*, trans. G.A. Williamson and Andrew Louth (London: Penguin Books, 1989), 104.

<sup>11</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, 106.

Repeating Papias’ claim, the Second Century apologist Irenaeus states, “Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect” (*Against Heresies* 3.1.1; [BibleWorks 8.0: Schaff, Early Church Fathers](#). MS Windows Vista/7 Release. Norfolk: BibleWorks, LLC, 2009-2010. DVD-ROM).

<sup>12</sup> D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, second edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 143.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 476.

<sup>15</sup> Guthrie, in *New Testament Introduction*, pp 46-48.

<sup>16</sup> D.A. Hagner, “Matthew, Gospel According to,” in *ISBE*, 3:281.

## Messianic Torah Helper

Conservatives will generally not argue against the disciple Matthew compiling a complete Gospel on behalf of the early Believers, which now bears his name—but how strong is the evidence that the canonical Greek text of Matthew that we have today is a translation of a complete text originally *written* in Hebrew or Aramaic? There are a few modern Christian scholars who hold that the canonical Greek Matthew is an essentially accurate and early translation of an original non-extant Hebrew version, but such claims have been contested. More concerning to be certain, though, are how many in today's Messianic movement feel that the canonical Greek Matthew could be a less-than-authoritative translation of an original Hebrew or Aramaic text, to be approached with a degree of suspicion. (Some Messianics, though, just say that the Greek text of Matthew is invalid.)

Textually speaking, any advocate of an original Hebrew or Aramaic written text for the Gospel of Matthew has a huge uphill mountain to climb. No ancient Hebrew or Aramaic Matthew from the Biblical period, or fragment of such a text, has surfaced that pre-dates our present Greek Matthew. "No Hebrew or Aramaic collection of Jesus' sayings has survived, so its existence must remain hypothetical" (Anthony J. Saldarini).<sup>17</sup> The Aramaic Peshitta, which includes the authorized New Testament for the Syrian Orthodox Church, dates from the Fourth-Fifth Centuries C.E., and is widely recognized as being a translation from the Greek Apostolic Scriptures (although quite an early and valuable one). While there are various editions of a so-called Hebrew Gospel of Matthew floating around, they all date from the Middle Ages.<sup>18</sup> The most popular of these is the Shem Tov Hebrew Matthew edited and translated into English by George Howard. This eclectic version is acknowledged in its introduction as being put together from a Jewish anti-missionary work entitled *Even Bohan* (אבן בוהן) from the Fourteenth Century C.E.,<sup>19</sup> originally intended to refute "Christian claims" about Yeshua being the Messiah (discussed further). Among its various theological problems,<sup>20</sup> it is also significantly tarnished by using the derogatory form *Yeshu* for the name of the Messiah (examined further).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Anthony J. Saldarini, "Matthew," in James D.G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson, eds., *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 1000.

<sup>18</sup> These include the Shem Tov Hebrew Matthew (1380), the Sebastian Münster edition (1537), and the duTillet manuscript (1555).

A history of these editions is summarized by Tim Hegg, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew: Chapters 1-7* (Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2007), pp 2-4. Regarding these versions he concludes, "[T]he Hebrew Matthews do not present 'a different Matthew' than what we know from the Greek textual witnesses," further concluding how they "do not bear greater weight than the extant Greek manuscripts" (Ibid., 4).

<sup>19</sup> George Howard, *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995), xi.

He later acknowledges how his text "does not preserve the original in a pure form. It reflects contamination by Jewish scribes during the Middle Ages" (Ibid., 178).

<sup>20</sup> These problems include, but are not limited to: the exclusion of the nations from the Kingdom in Matthew 10:5-6 (Ibid., 214), the preaching of the good news to the nations as being the antichrist and Abomination of Desolation in Matthew 24:14-15 (Ibid., 215), and most especially how "With the possible exception of [Matthew] 16:16. . .the author of Shem-Tob's Hebrew Matthew never identifies Jesus with the Christ" (Ibid., 216).

<sup>21</sup> The derogatory acronym *Yeshu* (ישו), *yimach sh'mo u'zikro* (ימח שמו וזכרו), means "may his name and memory be blotted out" (Ibid., 207).

## Is the Hebrew Matthew an Authentic Document?

No worthwhile Bible scholar today at all denies that there is both Semitic linguistic influence and Jewish theological significance involved with our canonical Greek Matthew. Yet there is no comprehensive evidence that should cause any faithful Believer to treat the canonical Gospel of Matthew in Greek as being something secondary or under-valued. The present canonical Greek Matthew has no indications of it being a translation of an original Hebrew Matthew. "Matthew's Greek reveals none of the telltale marks of a translation. Furthermore, Matthew's OT quotations are derived from the LXX [Septuagint] rather than the Hebrew text" (D.A. Hagner, *ISBE*).<sup>22</sup> If anything is to be noted, "The mix of text forms suggests an author writing in Greek but knowledgeable in Semitic languages and therefore able to vary his form" (Carson and Moo).<sup>23</sup> Any Hebraisms or Semitic language forms used in this Gospel and transcribed into Greek, would most likely be oral or from second hand notes, as "the view that Matthew, or any of our four gospels, was originally written in Aramaic, though warmly advocated by several modern scholars, has been almost universally repudiated. The gospel traditions undoubtedly once circulated in oral Aramaic; but the written gospels are Greek books, and the basic source for Matthew and Luke was unquestionably a Greek work, the Gospel According to Mark" (*IDB*).<sup>24</sup>

Among a wide number of modern interpreters, Eusebius' assertion that Matthew wrote in *Hebraïdi dialektō* (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.16) is thought to be synonymous to "in a Jewish style."<sup>25</sup> Scot McKnight is one who asserts, "the Greek expression *Hēbraïdi dialektō*, when investigated carefully. . . means not 'in the Hebrew language' but 'in a Hebrew rhetorical style.'"<sup>26</sup> This would make Matthew's Gospel an originally composed Greek document, which was sure to incorporate Hebraic sources, and as Eusebius notes everyone who read it would have interpreted it as best as possible. This probably regards not only how Matthew was understood by its original recipients, but also how it was integrated into other evangelistic and theological works.<sup>27</sup> McKnight further details, "the most recent scholarship on the Papias logion suggests that the traditional rendering is insufficient and should be understood now in the following manner: In contrast to Mark's unordered, chreia-style Gospel, Papias contends, Matthew composed a more Jewish, orderly styled Gospel. The original language, then, is of no concern to Papias. . . In all likelihood our Gospel of Matthew was composed originally in Greek and in a Jewish style."<sup>28</sup> Viewing Eusebius' remarks in this way can be very healthy, as it enables one to favorably view the text of the canonical Greek Matthew, while recognizing its Jewish

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<sup>22</sup> Hagner, "Matthew, Gospel According to," in *ISBE*, 3:281.

Hegg, *Matthew 1-7*, 5 only confirms, "the extant Greek Matthew does not read as a translation of a Hebrew original."

<sup>23</sup> Carson and Moo, 143.

<sup>24</sup> F.C. Grant, "Matthew, Gospel of," in George Buttrick, ed. et. al., *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 3:304.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Duane A. Garrett, ed., et. al., *NIV Archaeological Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 1556.

<sup>26</sup> S. McKnight, "Matthew, Gospel of," in Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 527.

This is certainly allowed from the meanings of *dialektos* (διάλεκτος) as "[manner of] discourse: discussion, debate, arguing" or "a way of speaking, enunciation" (*LS*, 190).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Hagner, "Matthew, Gospel of," in *ISBE*, 3:281.

<sup>28</sup> McKnight, "Matthew, Gospel of," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, pp 527-528.

## Messianic Torah Helper

origination and deep roots in the Hebrew Tanach (Old Testament). This, in fact, seems to be the default position of many Matthean examiners.

In our estimation, the two best options for Matthew's linguistic composition—given the extant textual data and the fact that no Hebrew or Aramaic text present pre-dates the canonical Greek Matthew—should be (1) that Papias' statements either referred to Matthew compiling Hebrew or Aramaic notes that he later used for a complete Greek composition (perhaps Q), or (2) that a style of writing common to Second Temple Judaism is intended. Yet, as some of the recent discussions over Matthew's origins have demonstrated, few in today's Messianic movement have even been informed that the *logia* (λόγια) referred to by Papias, could be anything other than a complete Hebrew Gospel of Matthew.

### The Hebrew Gospel of Matthew (HGM)

Many Messianic people, likely being unaware of the different viewpoints present in New Testament Studies regarding Papias' *logia* (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.16), will be easily swayed by arguments in favor of a written Hebrew origin for Matthew's Gospel. Since the Middle Ages, it is true that there have surfaced a number of versions of the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew. Some of these have claimed to originate from the Second Temple period, while others of them appear to have been composed by Medieval Christians for Jewish evangelism. *EDB* summarizes,

“During the Middle Ages Jewish authors, writing in Hebrew, often quote the Gospel of Matthew in a text different from the canonical Greek. In 1380 the Spanish Jewish polemist Shemtob ben Isaac ibn Shaprut incorporated the entire text of Matthew in Hebrew in his treatise, *'Eben Boḥan*. His text often corresponds to the earlier Jewish quotations of Matthew in Hebrew, leading to the speculation that Shemtob's text preserves an early copy of the Hebrew Matthew.

“In the 16th century Sebastian Münster and Jean du Tillet issued separate editions of Matthew in Hebrew, both reporting that they received their texts from the Jews. The versions of Münster and du Tillet, similar to each other, are distinct from the text of Shemtob. A close analysis of their differences reveals that the 16th-century editions, though based on a text like Shemtob's, have been thoroughly revised so that the Hebrew now reads closely to the Christian Greek and Latin Bibles of the Middle Ages.”<sup>29</sup>

The **Hebrew Gospel of Matthew** (HGM), with which we are mostly concerned, is derived from the Fourteenth Century work *Evan Bohan*, otherwise often called the Shem Tov Matthew. *The Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* by George Howard (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995), with an associated English translation, has made its way around much of the contemporary Messianic movement—even though Howard, as a textual critic, intended his *HGM* to be released as an entirely hypothetical work for scholars to consider, as a possible example of what an original Hebrew Matthew may have looked like (based, of course, in the conclusion that Papias' *logia*, λόγια did actually include a

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<sup>29</sup> George Howard, “Matthew, Hebrew Gospel of,” in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 874; cf. George Howard, “Matthew, Hebrew Version of,” in *ABD*, 4:642-643.

## Is the Hebrew Matthew an Authentic Document?

relatively complete Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew, and not one of the alternatives previously discussed).

Howard had to reconstruct his text from the *Evan Bohan*, a Hebrew name derived from Isaiah 28:16 and its reference to “a tested stone,” *even bochan* (אֶבֶן בִּחָן).<sup>30</sup> *Evan Bohan* was authored by a Spanish Jew named Shem Tov ibn Shaprut (or Shafrut), and completed in the late Fourteenth Century. The *Jewish Encyclopedia* summarizes,

[Shaprut was a] Spanish philosopher, physician, and polemic; born at Tudela in the middle of the fourteenth century. . . . While still a young man he was compelled to debate in public, on original sin and redemption, with Cardinal Pedro de Luna, afterward Pope Benedict XIII. This disputation took place in Pamplona, Dec. 26, 1375, in the presence of bishops and learned theologians. . . . As a Talmudic scholar he carried on a correspondence with Sheshet. At Tarazona he completed his ‘Eben Bohan’ (May, 1380 or 1385), a polemical work against baptized Jews. As a model and guide for this work, which consists of fourteen chapters, or ‘gates,’ and is written in the form of a dialogue, he took the polemical ‘Milhamot Adonai’ of Jacob ben Reuben, falsely attributed to David Kimhi. . . . Ibn Shaprut translated portions of the Four Gospels into Hebrew, accompanying them with pointed observations; answers to the latter, written by a neophyte named Jona, also exist in manuscript.”<sup>31</sup>

Portions of the Gospel of Matthew, written in Hebrew, are present in Shaprut’s *Evan Bohan*, and are involved with Shaprut refuting the Messiahship of Yeshua and Biblical doctrines essential to Messianic faith. George Howard does candidly state in his “Analysis and Commentary” to his *HGM* publication, that “Shem-Tob’s Matthew, as printed above, does not preserve the original in a pure form. It reflects contamination by Jewish scribes during the Middle Ages.”<sup>32</sup> Howard, appropriating the material of *Evan Bohan*, did his best to reconstruct the references from Matthew into a narrative similar to the accepted, canonical Greek text of Matthew.<sup>33</sup>

The text in which the original, presumed Hebrew Gospel of Matthew appears—**is not a Biblical manuscript or codex**—but rather a Jewish theological anti-missionary work, compiled by Shem Tov ibn Shaprut, who was a Jewish apologist. This work was designed to refute the actions of those Jews who in the Fourteenth Century had gone through Catholic Christian conversion. Included in this work was his version of the Gospel of Matthew, whose origins are spurious. It is not at all outside the realm of probability that Shaprut’s Matthew was actually translated from the Greek and/or Latin sources available by the ecclesiastical authorities of his day, as demonstrated by the inclusion of various Greek and Latin words in the Hebrew text (examined further). The University of Leiden in the Netherlands has a complete copy of one of the revised editions of his original work from 1584. This work is described as “a discussion on the articles of Christian belief. The

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. Romans 9:33; 10:11; 1 Peter 2:6.

<sup>31</sup> Richard Gottheil and Meyer Kayserling (n.d.). *Ibn Shaprut*, *Jewish Encyclopedia*. Retrieved 15 July, 2005, from <<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/8017-ibn-shaprut-shafrut>>.

<sup>32</sup> Howard, *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, 178.

<sup>33</sup> For a critical review of some of Howard’s methodology in the compilation of his *HGM*, consult William L. Petersen. (1998). *Some Observations on a Recent Edition of and Introduction to Shem-Tob’s “Hebrew Matthew.”* *The Pennsylvania State University Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies*. Accessible via <<http://rosetta.reltech.org/TC/vol03/Petersen1998a.html>>.

## Messianic Torah Helper

thirteenth book, exhibited here, (incorrectly called the twelfth book) is a translation and a critique on the Gospels, starting with Matthew."<sup>34</sup>

Howard, while believing that there are elements of an originally written Hebrew Gospel of Matthew from antiquity present in the *Evan Bohan*,<sup>35</sup> is clear in the analysis of his *HGM* publication that the theology present in his compilation could be quite problematic in some places:

"Some of the [theological] motifs are heretical when judged by the standard of traditional Christianity. These include the text's views regarding the Gentiles (saved only in the messianic era), the Christ/Messiah (never equated with Jesus), and John the Baptist (portrayed in an exalted position)."<sup>36</sup>

These, and some other potentially problematic theological issues, should be a bit disturbing for readers of Howard's *HGM*. Unfortunately, for various reasons, many Messianic people who have touted Howard's *HGM*, have only read from his English translation in piecemeal, and much of the rest of the *HGM* has been either overlooked or ignored. And, it cannot go unnoticed how more than a few people have only looked at Howard's *HGM* English version of his Hebrew reconstruction from Shaprut's Matthew references, and have not really even thought to look at some of Howard's own observations on the text he has constructed.

Up until the early 2000s, Howard's *HGM* was understandably constrained to the examination of various textual critics, examiners of the Gospel of Matthew, and a few people in the Messianic movement. This changed, however, with the 2005 release of the sensational and hype-laden book *The Hebrew Yeshua Vs. the Greek Jesus: New Light on the Seat of Moses from Shem-Tov's Hebrew Matthew* by Karaite Jew Nehemia Gordon (Hilkiah Press). He took a special interest at the different reading that the *HGM* appears to have provided for Matthew 23:2-3, as contrasted to the canonical Greek Matthew, which would support some of his non-traditional views of Karaite Judaism.<sup>37</sup> Suffice it to say, the release of Gordon's publication and the dissemination of it throughout the Messianic community ever since (in spite of the fact that Nehemia Gordon is **not at all** a professed Believer in Yeshua of Nazareth as Israel's Messiah), has seen the presumed Hebrew Gospel of Matthew receive a great deal of attention—both positive **and** negative.<sup>38</sup>

A (wide) number of contemporary Messianic people think that the Shem Tov Hebrew Matthew is authentic, and is primary to the Greek version of Matthew from which most Bibles are translated. Yet, in conducting some of the research for this article, I contacted

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<sup>34</sup> University of Leiden Bible Collection <<http://ub.leidenuniv.nl/bc/tentoonstelling/Judaica/object7.htm>>, accessed 15 July, 2005.

<sup>35</sup> Howard, *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, 178.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>37</sup> Matthew 23:2-3 has been addressed in the following chapter, "Who Sits in the Seat of Moses?"

<sup>38</sup> A **negative** view of the Hebrew Gospel of Matthew would be seen in: Brian J. Tebbitt and Tim Hegg. "Original Hebrew Gospel Discovered?" *Messiah Magazine* Issue 86, Bamidbar 5765 (2005); Tim Hegg. (2005). *Why Nehemia Gordon is Wrong About Matthew 23:3. Torah Resource*. Accessible via <<http://torahresource.com>>.

A more **positive** disposition of the Hebrew Gospel of Matthew is detectable in: James Scott Trimm, trans., *The Hebraic-Roots Version Scriptures* (Northriding, South Africa: Institute for Scripture Research, 2006), 1223; *The Scriptures*, third edition (Northriding, South Africa: Institute for Scripture Research, 2009), pp xix, 946.

## Is the Hebrew Matthew an Authentic Document?

the American Bible Society ([www.americanbible.org](http://www.americanbible.org)), which handles the majority of the issues regarding textual criticism in North America, concerning the Shem Tov Matthew. I was told that it is not consulted by New Testament textual critics as a legitimate primary, secondary, or tertiary source, even though it might be referenced in various Matthew commentaries here or there. This organization is highly credible, and involves textual critics from many Christian denominations, and all major branches of Judaism. The Hebrew Gospel of Matthew, pieced together by George Howard—while perhaps having some interesting aspects to it, was originally part of an anti-missionary work—and is presently not recognized as a legitimate text to use in textual criticism by either the United Bible Societies or the American Bible Society, which publish the critical texts used for almost all modern Jewish and Christian Bible versions.

One person in the Messianic movement, who has thankfully expressed some extreme caution regarding people accepting the Shem Tov Hebrew Matthew—and for that matter, any Hebrew Matthew edition originating from the Middle Ages—as being superior to the canonical Greek Matthew, has been Tim Hegg. In the introduction to his ongoing commentary on Matthew (2005-2013/2014?), Hegg summarizes much of the issue that has been spurred by the Shem Tov Hebrew Matthew, and draws some conclusions that are contradictory to various Messianic proponents of its authenticity:

In recent days, much has been made of the various copies of Matthew in Hebrew, and it has even been suggested that one of these copies, the so-called “Shem-Tov,” offers the best exemplar of Matthew’s original Gospel. Let me first give a very brief description of the various Hebrew Matthews, and then offer my approach to the question of “which Matthew?”

The oldest extant Hebrew Matthew is that of the *Even Bohan* (אבן בוחן, “The Touchstone”). This was a multi-volume work produced as a polemic against Christian missionaries who were doing their work among Jewish people. The *Even Bohan* was authored by Shem-Tov ben Isaac ben Shaprut (sometimes called Ibn Shaprut). It is a polemical work comprising 12 sections or books (though an additional five sections were added later). It was originally written by Shaprut in 1380, and revised several times through subsequent years.

Of the original books the first deals with the principles of the Jewish faith, the next nine deal with various passages in the Bible that were disputed by Jews and Christians, the eleventh discusses certain haggadic sections in the Talmud used by Christians or proselytes to Christianity, and the twelfth contains the entire Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew along with polemical comments by Shem Tob interspersed throughout the text [George Howard, *The Gospel of Matthew according to a Primitive Hebrew Text* (Mercer Press, 1987) p. ix].

George Howard has collated an eclectic text, comparing a number of extant manuscripts, and offered the Hebrew text of Matthew first in 1987 with a revised edition in 1995. The title of Howard’s 1987 suggested that the Shem Tov was, in fact, a “primitive Hebrew text” of Matthew. But scholarly critiques of his work made it clear that such an assertion was not well founded. Thus, in the subsequent revision, the title was changed simply to “Hebrew Gospel of Matthew.” Indeed, the reaction of the scholars to Howard’s work, and thus to the value of the Shem Tov Matthew, have been predictably varied. Numbers of scholars gave strong negative reviews, but a minority

## Messianic Torah Helper

were more cautious, and some have suggested that the Shem Tov Matthew should be given greater significance in the matter of textual criticism of Matthew's Gospel.

Two other Hebrew Matthews are extant: the Münster and du Tillet. Sebastian Münster published a Hebrew version of Matthew in 1537 which he titled *תּוֹרַת הַמָּשִׁיחַ* [*torat ha'Mashiach*], "The Torah of the Messiah." In his preface Münster states that he used a "tattered" MS [manuscript], and supplemented or altered its defective text. What is exactly meant by this notice has been debated. Some think the manuscript include many lacunae which Münster supplied from other texts (Latin or Greek). [William] Horbury suggests that the manuscript he used was interspersed with polemical comments, which he extracted in order to make the Matthew text contiguous. Since, however, Münster did not mark his editorial work, use of the Münster Matthew for text-critical purposes is dubious. In 1551, Johannes Quinquarboreus published Münster's Hebrew Matthew with critical notes in the margin, suggesting alternative readings and corrections, but it is not always clear if these were simply his own suggestions, or if he was utilizing other manuscripts to compare with the Münster.

The history of the Du Tillet Matthew is a bit uncertain. It was published in 1555 by Bishop Jean du Tillet, bishop of Saint-Brieuc, from whom it derives its name. In the preface to the published text he writes:

the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew, which I would not presume to suggest Matthew wrote by divine inspiration in his own language...but yet I can affirm is clearly not in the rabbinic style, and is written in a pure form of the language that in no way resembles the writings of post-Christian Judaism.

The 1555 publication was accompanied by a Latin translation (which closely followed the Vulgate) by Jean Mercier, and was published by the firm of Marin Le Juene (Martin the Younger). The Hebrew title page includes a note that it had been "stored until this day with the Jews and hidden in their dens," which most likely means that it was among the books confiscated under papal edict.

Both the Münster and Du Tillet texts show a far greater affinity to the Greek and Latin than does the Shem Tov. But there are also some agreements between the Shem Tov and Du Tillet against the Greek and Latin witnesses, and such affinity may therefore present an important witness to alternate readings in these few places.

But an overall assessment of the extant Hebrew Matthews indicates that the Greek text that underlies our English translations is not substantially altered by comparison. Or to put it simply: the Hebrew Matthews do not present a "different Matthew" than what we know from the Greek textual witnesses. The question, then, of "which Matthew" is moot. We are fortunate that so many manuscripts bear a unified and singular witness to the Gospel itself, while at the same time offering variant textual readings in various places. Thus, we will do well to consider all of the extant manuscript evidence, and to allow the preponderance of evidence (in accordance with accepted text critical methodology) to determine the reading to be received. Surely the Hebrew Matthews have a voice in these textual determinations, **but do not bear greater weight than the extant Greek manuscripts.** (emphasis mine)<sup>39</sup>

Among the different Hebrew Matthew versions, the Shem Tov edition has gained the most publicity. Hegg considers the Shem Tov Hebrew Matthew to "[present] some unique

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<sup>39</sup> Tim Hegg, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew: Chapters 1-7* (Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2007), pp 3-4.

## Is the Hebrew Matthew an Authentic Document?

or mostly unique readings,” and “In this regard, the Shem Tov has value as we seek to study Matthew’s Gospel.”<sup>40</sup> However, it cannot be ignored that his overall evaluation of the hypothetical Hebrew Gospel of Matthew, as represented by Howard, is largely negative. As Hegg widely concludes,

Shem Tov’s Matthew was originally interspersed with polemical comments by Ibn Shaprut. As such, it has clear tendencies toward textual corruption. For instance, an entire section (corresponding to Mark 9:20-28) is inserted following Matthew 17:17 in order to expand the single verse summary of the pericope given in Matthew’s version (17:18). In other words, Matthew 17:18 is replaced by nine verses from Mark in a revised form. In other places, words and phrases are clearly missing. For example, 18:2 breaks mid-sentence: “He called a lad...,” leaving out an entire section which Howard supplies from other manuscripts for his translation. Another example is 22:6, “And others [ ] and abused them and killed them.” Obviously the phrase “took his servants” is missing from the Shem Tov. Other anomalies occur in the Shem Tov text as well. In 16:16, Peter’s reply to Yeshua’s inquiry of “what do you say about me?” is: “You are the Messiah, that is, Kristo (קְרִיסְטוֹ), the Son of the living God, who has come into this world.” Here, it appears that the Even Bohan is transliterating the Greek word Χριστός, *Christos* as a gloss, perhaps to alert the readers to the fact that the Hebrew *mashiach* [מָשִׁיחַ] is called *Christos* by the Christians. But why is the final *sigma* [σ] omitted? In 24:14, the word “antichrist” is correctly transliterated. It appears that in this instance, a scribe has dropped off the final letter of *christos*. These few examples should be sufficient to show that the Shem Tov is far from pristine in terms of textual consistency.<sup>41</sup>

### Evaluating the Hebrew Gospel of Matthew

While George Howard’s Hebrew Gospel of Matthew publication admits in its “Analysis and Commentary” section (pp 153-234) that there are various theological issues present in this eclectic text, such theological issues tend to **barely grab the attention of some of today’s Messianic people**. Far too many, who acquire a copy of the *HGM*, do not review it critically enough for its theology—which is perhaps even more important than being aware of Howard’s eclectic assembly of a hypothetical text, originating from the Fourteenth Century anti-missionary work *Evan Bohan*.

We will be comparing George Howard’s English translation of his Hebrew Gospel of Matthew (*HGM*) to a mainline evangelical version like the New American Standard 1995 Update (*NASU*). You will find that the *HGM*, which tends to circulate in parts of the Messianic world, is not a publication which should be greatly trusted, and be considered too much, in one’s examination of Matthew’s Gospel.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 3.

## Messianic Torah Helper

### Matthew 1:1

"These are the generations of Jesus the son of David the son of Abraham" (*HGM*).<sup>42</sup>

"The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (NASU).

The *HGM* says in **Matthew 1:1** that Yeshua is *ben David ben Avraham* (דוד בן אברהם), but what is notably lacking is the reference to Yeshua as either "the Messiah" or "the Christ." The canonical Greek has *Iēsou Christou huiou David huiou Abraam* (Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ Δαυὶδ υἱοῦ Ἀβραάμ), and a more trustworthy modern Hebrew New Testament, like that of Delitzsch, similarly has *Yeshua ha'Mashiach ben-David ben-Avraham* (יֵשׁוּעַ הַמָּשִׁיחַ בֶּן דָּוִד בֶּן אַבְרָהָם).

The *HGM* does not identify Yeshua as being the Messiah or the Anointed One, from its opening lines. Being originally assembled from an anti-missionary work, it is not surprising that some critical references to Yeshua being the Messiah of Israel would either be missing, or perhaps just flat removed.

### Matthew 1:18

"The birth of Jesus was in this way:) It came to pass when his mother was betrothed to Joseph, before he knew her, she was found pregnant by the Holy Spirit" (*HGM*).<sup>43</sup>

"Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit" (NASU).

**Matthew 1:18** is a place in the *HGM* which only speaks about *Yeshu* (ישו), a derogatory Hebrew acronym (discussed further), and lacks any full reference to *Yeshua haMashiach* (יֵשׁוּעַ הַמָּשִׁיחַ; Delitzsch), similar to Matthew 1:1. While it is true that the *HGM* does speak of the conception of Yeshua *m'Ruach haQodesh* (מְרוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ), "by the Holy Spirit," the same as the canonical Greek *ek Pneumatos Hagiou* (ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου), "from the Holy Spirit" (NRSV/ESV), the lack of a Messianic titular reference to this occurring would *only* support the idea that God's sovereignty was involved—not necessarily that a Savior figure was about to be born.

### Matthew 1:21

"She will bear a son and you will call his name Jesus because he will save my people from their sins" (*HGM*).<sup>44</sup>

"She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (NASU).

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<sup>42</sup> Howard, *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, 3.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

## Is the Hebrew Matthew an Authentic Document?

The rendering of the *HGM* for **Matthew 1:21** is very similar to that of Delitzsch's rendering in his Nineteenth Century Hebrew version. The *HGM* has *sh'mo Yeshu ki hu yoshi'a et ami* (שמו ישוע כי הוא יושיע את עמי), similar to Delitzsch's *sh'mo Yeshua ki hu yoshi'a et-amo* (שמו ישוע כי הוא יושיע את-עמו).

The difference to be noted is how the *HGM* has *ami* (עמי) or "my people," and the Delitzsch version has *amo* (עמו) or "His people," which follows the canonical Greek *ton laon autou* (τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ). Is there a significant difference between "my people" or "His people"? Most probably. If this person being born into the world of human beings is only to be perceived as some kind of agent of God, then perhaps God is sending this person so that He can save "my people." Yet, we might want to consider how God has called His own to be a special, unique possession (Deuteronomy 4:20; cf. Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:9)—and an identification of Yeshua as the One who saves *His people*, whom He possesses, can be recognized as ancillary support for His Divinity, as the Messiah is to precisely be "God with us" (Matthew 1:23).

While it is to be agreed that Miriam/Mary was not told to name her child the Greek *Iēsous* (Ἰησοῦς)—even though this name hardly originates from the name *Zeus* (Ζεὺς), and *Iēsous* was the title of the Book of Joshua in the Septuagint<sup>45</sup>—the *HGM* does not employ the standard Hebrew name *Yeshua* (ישוע), which means "Salvation," and appears in modern Hebrew NT versions like those of Delitzsch, Salkinson-Ginsburg, and the UBS 1991 edition.

The Messiah's name in the *HGM* is spelled as ישי, *yod-shin-vav*, with the specific intent of the reader not to pronounce it as "Yeshua" or "Salvation." Howard notes that "The explanation given for this change is that ישי stands for שמו וזכרו [yimach sh'mo u'zikro], meaning: 'may his name and memory be blotted out.' Whatever can be made of this story, the spelling ישי for the name of Jesus became common in medieval Jewish polemics and can be found even in the Talmud (cf. b. Sanh. 43a)."<sup>46</sup> The employment of *Yeshu*, for the name of the Messiah in the *HGM*, gives ample testimony to its origins as an anti-missionary work.

### Matthew 3:11

**"John answered all of them: Behold I truly baptize you in the days of repentance, but another comes mightier than I, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to unfasten. He will baptize you with the fire of the Holy Spirit" (HGM).<sup>47</sup>**

**"As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (NASU).**

In the words of John the Immerser (Baptist) in **Matthew 3:11**, the *HGM* says that people will be immersed *b'eish Ruach haQodesh* (באש רוח הקדוש), "the fire of the Holy Spirit." Both the Delitzsch and Salkinson-Ginsburg modern Hebrew versions have *b'Ruach*

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<sup>45</sup> Consult the FAQ, "Jesus, Pagan Name."

<sup>46</sup> Howard, *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, 207.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

## Messianic Torah Helper

*haQodesh u'b'eish* (בְּרִיחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ וּבְאֵשׁ), which follows the canonical Greek *en Pneumati Hagiō kai puri* (ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ καὶ πυρί). The *HGM* appears to identify the Holy Spirit as a fire, whereas the canonical Greek asserts that people will be immersed/baptized with both/either the Holy Spirit and fire.

While a debated passage to be sure, especially in terms of various charismatic Christians who might fully equate the Holy Spirit with being a fire—Matthew 3:12 further states, “His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” Contextually speaking, to be immersed in fire is to experience eternal punishment. Identifying the Holy Spirit as a fire, in Matthew 3:11-12, is theologically incorrect.<sup>48</sup> Recognizing what the canonical Greek Matthew says (and even some modern Hebrew translations), correctly asserts that there will be some immersed in the Holy Spirit, meaning that they will be exalted and given the gift of the Spirit—and others will be immersed with fire, meaning that they will be judged.

### Matthew 6:9-10

**“But thus you shall pray: Our father, may your name be sanctified; may your kingdom be blessed; may your will be done in heaven and on earth” (*HGM*).<sup>49</sup>**

**“Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven’” (*NASU*).**

It is very easy to overlook the omission in Matthew 6:10, from the Lord’s prayer, because there is nothing theologically or spiritually wrong with the statement which appears in the *HGM*: *v’yitbarakh malkutekha* (וַיְחַבְרַךְ מַלְכוּתְךָ), “may your kingdom be blessed.” There is something theologically or spiritually amiss, when what appears in the canonical Greek is instead: *elthetō hē basileia sou* (ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου), “Your kingdom come.” This is followed by both the Delitzsch and Salkinson-Ginsburg modern Hebrew versions with *tavo malkutekha* (תבא מלכותך).

Why does the version of the Lord’s prayer in the *HGM* exclude the appeal for God’s Kingdom to come? Whether one takes the “coming” of God’s Kingdom as a reality to be manifest in the present lives of His people, or a future eschatological reality to come to Earth—the promise of God’s Kingdom “coming” is missing, as opposed to the *HGM* saying something to the effect of the dual, “May Your kingdom be blessed, may Your kingdom come.” One is left to widely conclude that since the *HGM* is pieced together from an anti-missionary document, then there is an intent to present Yeshua as not being a figure who is to usher in the Kingdom of God upon Earth.

The canonical Greek text of Matthew (and some subsequent modern Hebrew versions) in contrast, presents the Messiah commanding His followers to pray that God’s Kingdom come to and thus be established on Earth. Born again Believers are of the firm conviction that this is to consummate in the future at His Second Coming.

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<sup>48</sup> For a further examination of this issue, G.W. Bromiley, “Baptism of Fire,” in *ISBE*, 1:426.

<sup>49</sup> Howard, *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, 25.

# Is the Hebrew Matthew an Authentic Document?

## Matthew 7:28-29

"While Jesus was speaking these words all the people were greatly astonished at his conduct, because he was preaching to them with great power, not as the rest of the sages" (*HGM*).<sup>50</sup>

"When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as *one* having authority, and not as their scribes" (*NASU*).

In **Matthew 7:29**, the *HGM* says that while Yeshua had *koach gadol* (כח גדול) or "great power," He is only associated *k'asher ha'chakamim* (כשאר החכמים), "as...the sages." The canonical Greek has *exousian* (ἐξουσίαν) or "authority," which is only slightly different than "power," and is not really an issue. But also, in contrast, the Greek has *hoi grammateis autōn* (οἱ γραμματεῖς αὐτῶν), "their scribes," followed by the *UBSHNT* with *soferei'hem* (סופריהם).

While it is doubtlessly true that Yeshua was a Master Teacher, the *HGM* appears to make Him out just to be another scribe or sage or rabbi. Yeshua, in having either power or authority, should not be merely associated with the company of the scribes or sages. The canonical Greek Matthew separates Him enough from the normal company of religious teachers of His day, affirming that He is indeed unique. An anti-missionary work like the *Evan Bohan*, from which the *HGM* was assembled, would not want to portray Yeshua as being too different from your standard run-of-the-mill First Century Jewish teacher.

## Matthew 9:2

"They brought to him one who was sick with contractions, that is, paralytic, lying upon his bed. Jesus saw their faith and said to the sick man: Have courage my son. It is by the faith of God that your sins have been forgiven" (*HGM*).<sup>51</sup>

"And they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, "Take courage, son; your sins are forgiven'" (*NASU*).

It is very easy to see the differences between the *HGM* and the canonical Greek Matthew, and what they communicate about the nature of Yeshua via this healing in **Matthew 9:2**. The means by which the paralytic is forgiven in the *HGM* is stated to be *b'emunat haEl* (באמונת האל), "by the faith of God." While this statement is not theologically incorrect, the canonical Greek Matthew says something noticeably different. In the narrative, Yeshua Himself directly says *aphientai sou hai hamartiai* (ἀφιένται σου αἱ ἁμαρτίαι), "your sins are forgiven."

In the canonical Greek Matthew, Yeshua directly forgave the invalid's sins Himself. It cannot go unnoticed from the testimony of the Gospels, that some Pharisees who criticized Yeshua concluded that He was a blasphemer because He forgave sins, something that only God Himself could do (Mark 2:7; Luke 5:21). Yeshua could only be

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 37.

## Messianic Torah Helper

regarded as One legitimately forgiving sins, if He were, in fact, Divine. The *HGM*, as a product of the anti-missionary *Evan Bohan*, is not going to uphold Yeshua being God, and with it His offering direct forgiveness for sins.

### Matthew 12:6

"Truly I say to you that the temple is greater than this" (*HGM*).<sup>52</sup>

"But I say to you that something greater than the temple is here" (NASU).

It is generally to be recognized in the scene of Matthew 12:1-7 and plucking grain on the Sabbath, that Yeshua's teachings/actions/deeds/*halachah* is what is taken to be the most important thing here—as it reflects the will of the Father (Matthew 12:7; cf. Hosea 6:6). This is why the canonical Greek Matthew says *tu hierou meizon estin hōde* (τοῦ ἱεροῦ μείζον ἐστὶν ὧδε), "something greater than the temple is here," followed by a modern version like Delitzsch which has *yesh-po gadol min-ha'miqdash* (יֵשׁ-פָּה גָּדוֹל מִן-הַמִּקְדָּשׁ). Contrary to this, the *HGM* has *sh'miqdash gadol m'menu hu* (שְׁמִקְדָּשׁ גָּדוֹל מִמֶּנּוּ הוּא).

The *HGM*, commenting on the place of the Torah and the Temple, attests that only the Temple is greater than the bread of the presence (Matthew 12:4). Yeshua, in the canonical Greek Matthew, attests that He is the One who is greater than the Temple. Once again, we encounter an example in the *HGM* which denies that Yeshua the Messiah is primary to all other things.

### Matthew 16:16

"Simon, called Petros, answered and said: You are the Messiah, that is, Kristo, the Son of the Living God, who has come into this world" (*HGM*).<sup>53</sup>

"Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God'" (NASU).

**Matthew 16:16** represents a place in the *HGM* where some severe skepticism toward its historical authenticity needs to be demonstrated. One should not be immediately taken back by seeing *Shimon niqra Petros* (שִׁמְעוֹן נִקְרָא פֵּיִטְרוֹס), "Simon, called Petros," in the *HGM*, because modern Hebrew versions like those of Delitzsch and Salkinson-Ginsburg similarly have *Shimon Petros* (שִׁמְעוֹן פֵּטְרוֹס), following the canonical Greek's *Simōn Petros* (Σίμων Πέτρος).

The bigger issue for certain, appears in Simon Peter's declaration *atah Mashiach laz Qristo* (אַתָּה מָשִׁיחַ לְעוֹ קְרִיסְטוֹ). The modern versions of Delitzsch and Salkinson-Ginsburg, in contrast, simply have *atah hu haMashiach* (אַתָּה הוּא הַמָּשִׁיחַ), following the canonical Greek *su ei ho Christos* (σὺ εἶ ὁ χριστός).

If the *HGM* is an authentic Hebrew source written by Matthew, the tax collector Levi, himself, then the dialogue actually has Simon Peter clearly calling Yeshua what appears in its Hebrew text as *Qristo* (קְרִיסְטוֹ), which is undoubtedly a Hebrew transliteration of *Christos* (Χριστός), the Greek word meaning "Anointed One" that is most frequently rendered as "Christ" in English Bibles. Why would Peter be referring to Yeshua

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 79.

## Is the Hebrew Matthew an Authentic Document?

as *Qristo* in a Hebrew document supposedly written by Matthew? This is an internal proof of the fact that the *HGM* does not originate from the First Century period, given the presence of a Greek-derived term such as *Qristo* in its text. This is stronger proof of the *HGM* being assembled from Greek and/or Latin sources in the Middle Ages, in the Shem Tov's writing of his *Evan Bohan*.

### Matthew 17:11-13

"He answered them and said: Indeed Elijah will come and will save all the world. I say to you, he has already come, they did not know him, and they did to him according to their desire. (So) they will do to the Son of Man. Then the disciples understood that regarding John the Baptizer he was saying this" (*HGM*).<sup>54</sup>

"And He answered and said, 'Elijah is coming and will restore all things; but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.' Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist" (NASU).

Theologically, it is not difficult to discern the issues between what the *HGM* has for **Matthew 17:11**, and what the canonical Greek has. The *HGM* reads with *Eliyahu yavo v'yoshia kol ha'olam* (יבא ויושיע כל העולם), "Elijah will come and will save all the world." The canonical Greek has the contrasting, *Hēlias men erchetai kai apokatastēsei panta* (Ἡλίας μὲν ἔρχεται καὶ ἀποκαταστήσει πάντα), "Elijah is coming and will restore all things" (TLV). This is followed by a modern Hebrew version like that of Delitzsch with *Eliyahu yavo bari'shonah v'hei'shiv et-ha'kol* (אֱלִיָּהוּ יבא בְּרֵאשׁוֹנָה וְהֵשִׁיב אֶת־הַכּוֹל).

The *HGM* says that "Elijah will come and save all the world," whereas the canonical Greek says "Elijah is coming and will restore all things." The latter makes Elijah, or perhaps the spirit in which Elijah functioned (which is later applied to John the Immerser), as a precursor to the coming of the Messiah who will actually save. The restoration of all things, being brought via Elijah, is a bit different than Elijah saving the world. Howard notes in his *HGM* publication that "John the Baptist in the Hebrew text. . . plays a more exalted role than in the canonical gospels."<sup>55</sup> Later on, he states quite candidly, "John the Baptist is given an exalted role,"<sup>56</sup> in contrast to Yeshua who is obviously being downplayed. In this passage, Elijah becomes the savior as opposed to Yeshua, who is the Savior. Why is this the case? Is it intended to disprove the Messiahship of Yeshua?

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

### Matthew 19:28

"Jesus said: Truly I say to you who follow me, in the day of judgment when man sits upon the throne of his glory you also will sit upon the twelve thrones of the twelve tribes of Israel" (*HGM*).<sup>57</sup>

"And Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel"" (*NASU*).

**Matthew 19:28** obviously presents Yeshua speaking of the future, eschatological restored Kingdom of Israel, and there are notable differences between the *HGM* and the canonical Greek Matthew. The *HGM* says *k'asher yeisheiv ha'adam al kisei kevodo* (כבודו על כסא). It is interesting that a modern Hebrew version like that of Delitzsch is almost identical to this: *k'asher yeisheiv ben-ha'adam kisei kevodo* (על-כסא כבודו), following the canonical Greek *hotan kathisē ho huios tou anthrōpou epi thronou doxēs autou* (ὅταν καθίσῃ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐπὶ θρόνου δόξης αὐτοῦ). The omission, however, is clear: in the *HGM* the Divine title of *ben-ha'adam* (Delitzsch) or the Son of Man (*ho huios tou anthrōpou*) is decisively missing, and the *HGM* only has *ha'adam*, man/humanity. This is a major title of significance for Yeshua, given the fact that it is taken directly from the theophany of Daniel 7:13-14.<sup>58</sup>

The *HGM* has been caught excluding a Divine title for Yeshua, the Son of Man, instead only making reference to restored man/humanity in the eschaton. The canonical Greek Matthew presents Yeshua as the Son of Man establishing His Kingdom and who decisively restores humanity, and then granting power to His Twelve Disciples, who will rule over the restored Israel. Once again, the origins of the *HGM* as an anti-missionary work, intended to downplay and disregard the authority of Yeshua, are noticeably detectable.<sup>59</sup>

### Matthew 24:14-15

"And this gospel, that is, evungili, will be preached in all the earth for a witness concerning me to all the nations and then the end will come. This is the Anti-Christ and this is the abomination which desolates which was spoken of by Daniel [as] standing in the holy place. Let the one who reads understand" (*HGM*).<sup>60</sup>

"This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come. Therefore when you see the

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>58</sup> "I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and *men of every* language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed" (Daniel 7:13-14).

<sup>59</sup> Given the theological and emotional complexities manifested over **Matthew 23:2-3**, in various parts of the contemporary Messianic movement, these verses have been purposefully left out of the examination of this article.

Matthew 23:2-3 has been addressed in the following chapter "Who Sits in the Seat of Moses?"

<sup>60</sup> Howard, *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, 121.

## Is the Hebrew Matthew an Authentic Document?

ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand)" (NASU).

Within the Olivet Discourse teaching of Yeshua on the Last Days, the *HGM* edition of **Matthew 24:14-15** includes two statements, which discount it as not only a legitimate product of the First Century C.E., but represent it also as being in severe theological error.

The first, and most obvious issue, is the presence of the Greek-Latin derived term "evungili" (איוונגילי), likely via *euangelion* (εὐαγγέλιον) or "gospel." The *HGM* is obviously not a product of First Century Hebrew composition, with this term employed to describe *besorah* (בשורה) or "gospel."

The second, but most problematic issue, as seen in Matthew 24:15 in the *HGM*, as it is a text which actually identifies the proclamation of the good news or gospel to the whole world as being "the Anti-Christ." Aside from making such a blasphemous assertion—discounting the Creator's desire to see all of humanity saved from its sins—the *HGM* actually says *zeh anti-qrastos* (זה אנטיקריסטוס) or "this is the *anti-qrastos*" in its Hebrew text, using a Hebrew transliteration of the Greek *antichristos* (ἀντίχριστος). Howard, as the compiler of the *HGM*, is honest, though, as he details,

"The Hebrew text is difficult, it appears to mean that preaching the gospel to the Gentiles before the end-time is the Anti-Christ and the abomination which desolates. No stronger statement against the salvation of the Gentiles in the present age occurs in Shem-Tov's Hebrew Matthew."<sup>61</sup>

In response to this, some may claim that the Shem Tov ibn Shaprut, inserted the term *anti-qrastos* in Hebrew as a textual gloss off to the side.<sup>62</sup> This would mean that when readers would examine his *Evan Bohan*, they would be pointed to a section of Yeshua's teaching that would be referred or associated with the "Anti-Christ" by Christian teachers. But this is problematic, because the text of the anti-missionary *Evan Bohan* is Shem Tov's philosophical diatribe against Yeshua's Messiahship and ministry work. If this were only a gloss, then this reference to the *anti-qrastos* should have been included exclusively with the later commentary concerning Matthew 24:14-15, and not in the text itself. This reinforces the thrust of the text which is that salvation is excluded from non-Israelites.

If the theology of this statement is not problematic enough, the fact that the *HGM*, again supposedly written by Matthew Levi the tax collector in Hebrew—actually uses a Greek word like *antichristos*—proves that its origins are not from Second Temple Judaism, making it most likely derived from Medieval Greek and Latin sources.

There are probably some more passages from George Howard's *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* that could be examined, and other problematic issues that likely could be probed. Yet, the previous analysis on Matthew 1:1, 18, 21; 3:11; 6:9-10; 7:28-29; 9:2; 12:6;

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>62</sup> So concludes Nehemia Gordon, *The Hebrew Yeshua vs. the Greek Jesus: New Light on the Seat of Moses from Shem-Tov's Hebrew Matthew* (Hilkiah Press, 2005), pp 79-82.

## Messianic Torah Helper

16:16; 17:11-13; 19:28; 24:14-15, should demonstrate clearly enough that the *HGM* publication floating around the Messianic community, **must be treated with extreme suspicion and great caution on *theological grounds***. There should be no substantial reason whatsoever for contemporary Messianic people to devalue or disregard the canonical Greek Matthew.