

Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus

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Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus, by David Bivin and Roy Blizzard. Arcadia, CA: Makor Publishing, 1983. Pp. 172. Paper. No price.

It was during my sabbatical year in Jerusalem that I first became acquainted with David Bivin, Robert Lindsey, and other students and colleagues of David Flusser of the Hebrew University. Thus it was with considerable anticipation that I began reading this book by David Bivin and Roy Blizzard, which popularizes some of the results of a whole generation of research into the linguistic and literary background of the synoptic Gospels by Prof. Flusser, Dr. Lindsey, and their associates in Jerusalem. The ideas of the book are generally good, and I can be enthusiastic about most of them. The informal style and largely undocumented format in which these ideas are presented, however, may for many detract from their ready acceptance.

The Milieu and Burden of the Book

It is important to understand that this book was born out of a combination of circumstances which cannot be found anywhere except in Israel and which could not have been found even in Israel only a few years ago. These factors include a *rapprochement* between Jewish and Christian scholars in a completely Jewish University, freedom of study unhampered by religious hierarchical control, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and a growing appreciation for their bearing on NT study, and most importantly, the fact that gospel research in Jerusalem is carried on in spoken and written Hebrew very similar in many respects to the Hebrew idiom (Mishnaic Hebrew)¹ of

¹ See, for example, Jack Fellman, "The Linguistic Status of Mishnaic Hebrew," JNSL 5 (1977) 21-22; Chaim Rabin, "The Historical Background of Qumran Hebrew," Scripta Hierosolymitana, vol. 4: *Aspects of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. by Chaim Rabin and Yigael Yadin (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1958) 144-61; and W. Chomsky, "What Was the Jewish Vernacular During the Second Commonwealth?" JQR 42 (1951-52) 193-212; Jonas C. Greenfield, "The Languages of Palestine, 200 B.C.E.-200 C.E." in *Jewish Languages. Theme and Variations*, ed. by Herbert H. Paper (Cambridge, MA: Association for Jewish Studies, 1978) 143-54; Herbert C. Youtie, "Response," in *Jewish Languages. Theme and Variations*, 155-57; Joshua Blau, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1976), I; E. Y. Kutscher, "Hebrew Language: The Dead Sea Scrolls," *Encyclopedia Judaica* 16: cols. 1583-90; *Idem*, "Hebrew Language: Mishnaic Hebrew," *Encyclopedia Judaica* 16: cols. 1590-1607

Jesus' day. All of this, moreover, is accomplished in the midst of growing recognition among NT scholars that the key to understanding a number of sayings in the gospels has been lost, unless one finds it in Jewish and Hebrew sources.

The more technical background of *Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus* is to be found in scholarly literature authored by Flusser, Safrai, and others at Hebrew University,² but especially important as a prelude or companion to this book are two works by Robert L. Lindsey, pastor of Baptist House in Jerusalem for the past forty years. Accordingly, discussion of Lindsey's work is integrated here with the suggestions of Bivin and Blizzard. The first of Lindsey's works is entitled *A Hebrew Translation of the Gospel of Mark* (with a foreword by Flusser)³ and the second a pamphlet entitled simply, *The Gospels*.⁴

The burden of these books may be summarized in a few propositions, which not only go counter in some respects to the prevailing wisdom of NT scholarship outside of Israel, but also represent something perhaps more revolutionary than might first appear. These propositions are:

- Hebrew was the primary spoken and written medium of the majority of the Jews in Israel during the time of Jesus
- Jesus therefore did most if not all of his teaching in Hebrew

² Many of these articles are available in English. A sampling of Professor Flusser's writings follows (some of them are English summaries of Hebrew articles): *Jesus* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969); "Jesus," *Encyclopedia Judaica* 10: cols. 10-17; "Martyrdom in Second Temple Judaism and in Early Christianity," *Immanuel* 1 (1972) 37-38; "The Liberation of Jerusalem-A Prophecy in the New Testament," *Immanuel* 1 (1972) 35-36; "The Last Supper and the Essenes," *Immanuel* 2 (1973) 23-27; "Jewish Roots of the Liturgical Trishagion," *Immanuel* 3 (1973-74) 37-43; "Did You Ever See a Lion Working as a Porter?" *Immanuel* 3 (1973/74) 61-64; "Hebrew Improperia," *Immanuel* 4 (1974) 51-54; "Hillel's Self-Awareness and Jesus," *Immanuel* 4 (1974) 31-36; "Two Anti-Jewish Montages in Matthew," *Immanuel* 5 (1975) 37-45; "Theses 51 on the Emergence of Christianity from Judaism," *Immanuel* 5 (1975) 74-84; "The Crucified One and the Jews," *Immanuel* 7 (1977) 25-37; "Do You Prefer New Wine?" *Immanuel* 9 (1979) 26-31; "The Hubris of the Antichrist in a Fragment from Qumran," *Immanuel* 10 (1980) 31-37; "At the Right Hand of the Power," *Immanuel* 14 (1982) 42-46; "Foreword" in Robert Lisle Lindsey, *A Hebrew Translation of the Gospel of Mark* (Jerusalem: Dugith, 1973) 1-8. Flusser and Safrai together: "The Slave of Two Masters," *Immanuel* 6 (1976) 30-33; "Jerusalem in the Literature of the Second Temple Period," *Immanuel* 6 (1976) 43-45; "Some Notes on the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12; Luke 6:20-26)," *Immanuel* 8 (1978) 37-47. "Who Sanctified the Beloved in the Womb," *Immanuel* 11 (1980) 46-55; "The Essene Doctrine of Hypostatis and Rabbi Meir," *Immanuel* 14 (1982) 47-57. Safrai alone: "The Synagogues South of Mt. Judah," *Immanuel* 3 (1973-1974) 44-50; "Pilgrimage to Jerusalem at the Time of the Second Temple," *Immanuel* 5 (1975) 51-62.

³ Robert Lisle Lindsey, *A Hebrew Translation of the Gospel of Mark* (Jerusalem: Dugith, 1973).

⁴ Robert Lisle Lindsey, *The Gospels* (Jerusalem: Dugith, 1972). Also important are his articles "A Modified Two-Document Theory of the Synoptic Dependence and Interdependence," *NovT* 6 (1963) 239-63; and "Did Jesus Say Verily or Amen?" *Christian News from Israel* 24 (1973).

- the original accounts of Jesus' life were composed in Hebrew (as one might conclude anyway from early church history)⁵
- the Greek gospels which have come down to us represent a third or fourth stage in the *written*⁶ transmission of accounts of the life of Jesus
- Luke was the first gospel written, not Mark⁷
- the key to understanding many of the difficult or even apparently unintelligible passages in the gospels is to be found not primarily in a better understanding of Greek, but in retroversion to and translation of the Hebrew behind the Greek (made possible by the often transparently literalistic translation methods of the Greek translators).

Although many of the same ideas have been proposed for some time on the basis of Aramaic NT originals,⁸ the insertion of Hebrew into the picture is becoming more and more accepted, especially among speakers of Modern Hebrew, perhaps because a conversational knowledge of Hebrew makes it

⁵ Among early Christian writers who speak on the subject there is unanimous agreement that Matthew wrote his gospel in Hebrew. The testimonies include Papias (Fragment 6); Irenaeus (Against Heresies 3.1); Origen (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5:25); Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 3:24); and Jerome (*Lives of Illustrious Men* 3). "

⁶ Lindsey, *The Gospels*, 4; *A Hebrew Translation of the Gospel of Mark*, xix-xx.

⁷ This is developed much more at length by Lindsey on the basis of the order of the stories or units in the Synoptics. There are 77 units found in all three of the gospels. 60 of these are in the same order in all three gospels. Mark contains 1 unit unknown to Matthew and Luke; Matthew contains 27 units unknown to Mark and Luke; Luke contains 46 units unknown to Mark and Matthew. These "extra" units occur, usually in groups, in between the 60 units which the Synoptics share in common. Most remarkable is the fact that Matthew and Luke contain 36 units which are unknown in Mark, "yet only in one of these units do Matthew and Luke agree as to where to place them among the 60-unit outline they share with Mark" (*The Gospels*, 6). Lindsey continues: "When we put these and many other facts together we see (1) that it is improbable that either Matthew or Luke saw the writing of the other and (2) that Mark's Gospel somehow stands between Matthew and Luke causing much of the agreement of story-order and wording we see in the Synoptic Gospels. We also see that whatever be the order of our Gospel dependence it is probable that each had at least one source unknown to us" (*Ibid.*, 6). Lindsey suggests that it is the vocabulary of Mark that is the key to priority. The unique story units show that Mark used either Matthew or Luke. The book which shows uniquely Markan vocabulary was probably dependent upon Mark and the one which does not contain Mark's unique vocabulary probably preceded Mark. It is Matthew that carries over many of Mark's unique expressions, while they are usually missing from Luke. Hence, the order of composition seems to be Luke, Mark, Matthew (*Ibid.*, 6-7). The numbers in the statistics and quotations above have been slightly corrected to coincide with those in *A Hebrew Translation of the Gospel of Mark*, pp. xi-xiii.

⁸ Cf. Gustaf Dalman, *The Words of Jesus Considered in the Light of Post-Biblical Jewish Writings and the Aramaic Language*, trans. by D. M. Kay (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902); Matthew Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (3rd ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1967); and Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Essays on the Semitic Background of the New Testament* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1971); and *Idem*, "The Contribution of Qumran Aramaic to the Study of the New Testament," *NTS* 20 (1974) 382-407.

easier to see the Hebrew syntax behind a document. Some of the other ideas are old ones now revived, and some of the propositions, especially those of Lindsey are quite new. At first glance, some evangelicals will undoubtedly be inclined to say that such an approach represents something dangerous for or incongruous with certain modern conceptions of inspiration and formulations of inerrancy, especially when taken together with the inferences which are commonly drawn out of them by American Christians. But such fears would be unfounded, and objections based on such misgivings should be held in check, until it becomes clear whether the problem is with the theory of Hebrew backgrounds for the Synoptics (to which one might easily add the first half of Acts and the book of Hebrews, although Bivin and Blizzard do not), or with the theories of composition and authorship and notions of literary convention that are sometimes attached to accepted notions of the inspiration of these ancient documents of the Church.

The Language of Jesus

Bivin and Blizzard first take up the question of the language of Jesus. This question is not settled as easily as one might expect from reading the unfortunate translation of **Ebraij** and **Ebraištias** "Aramaic" in the NIV (John 5:2; 19:13, 17, 20; 20:16; Acts 21:40; 22:2; 26:14). One would have expected a little more reticence in changing the text on the part of these particular translators. In their defense, however, it must be said that they are following in part the suggestion of the Greek lexicon available at that time,⁹ but the more recent lexicon¹⁰ which was published the year after the complete NIV, adds that "Grintz, *JBL* 79, '60, 32-47 holds that some form of Hebrew was commonly spoken." Had either Gingrich and Danker or the translators of the NIV been aware of the large amount of literature published between 1960 and 1978 which supports Grintz's contention, they undoubtedly would have taken more seriously the NT's statement that these words were Hebrew¹¹ It is a little unfair, for example, that the NIV takes "Rabboni" in John 20: 16 as "Aramaic" when the text says that it is Hebrew, and it is in fact equally as good Hebrew as Aramaic.¹² Even if it were Aramaic, it undoubtedly could have been described as Hebrew as legitimately as "Abba" and "Imma" can be

⁹ William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian literature* (A translation and adaptation of Walter Bauer's *Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der übrigen urchristlichen literature*, fourth revised and augmented edition, 1952; Chicago: University of Chicago, 1957) 212.

¹⁰ William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian literature* (Second edition revised and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker from Walter Bauer's fifth edition, 1958; Chicago: University of Chicago, 1979) 213.

¹¹ See nn. 1, 2, and 3 of this article for a listing of some of this literature.

¹² M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim. The Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi. and the Midrashic Literature*, (reprint; Brooklyn: P. Shalom, 1967) 1440. Josephus seems to use "language of the fathers" (J. W. 5.2) and "Hebrew" (J. W. 6.2.1) to refer to Hebrew and not Aramaic as the spoken language of the people during the siege of Jerusalem.

today, though in fact these last two may also be described as "Aramaic loan words." *NIV* reverts to "Hebrew" for **Ebrišti** in Rev 9:11 and 16:16, where there is no choice but to understand the words "Abaddon" (a synonym for hell in Rabbinic literature)¹³ and "Armageddon" as Hebrew. Somewhat less defensible is the *NIV*'s insertion of the Aramaic words **El wi, El wi** in Matthew's account of the crucifixion (27:46), with little important textual support.¹⁴ These translations of the *NIV* show the bias which Bivin and Blizzard oppose.

Their first chapter reminds the reader that 78% of the biblical text as we have it is in Hebrew (most of the OT). If one grants to Bivin and Blizzard for the moment their assertion about Hebrew originals for the gospels and adds to the OT the highly Hebraic portions of the NT (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Acts 1:1-15:35, which together constitute 40% of the NT), the percentage of the biblical material with a Hebrew background rises to 87% (subtracting the 1% that is in Aramaic in Daniel and Ezra). When one further adds the 176 quotations from the OT in John and from Acts 15:36 to the end of the NT, this percentage rises to over 90%. To this Bivin and Blizzard might have added the entire book of Hebrews, which early Christian writers who speak on the subject agree was written by Paul in Hebrew and translated into Greek either by Luke or Clement of Rome.¹⁵ This would bring the percentage of NT books with a Hebrew background even closer to 100%.¹⁶ All of this leads

¹³ Ibid., 3.

¹⁴ The textual support in favor of the Aramaic phrase is: x B 33 cop^{sa,bo} eth, but as Metzger points out, this was undoubtedly an assimilation to the Aramaic reading in Mark 15:34. The manuscripts are more divided on the spelling in Greek of the transliterated Hebrew למה (why?) as well as שׁוֹכֵחַ (forsaken), with Codex Bezae characteristically giving a completely Hebrew reading of the quotation from Ps 22:1, ----- representing the Hebrew שׁוֹכֵחַ. Thus the *NIV* strikes out on its own here, rejecting the reading of the Byz family, most other manuscripts, and the UBS text as well (Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* [New York: United Bible Societies, 1971] 70,119-20).

¹⁵ Eusebius speaks of this tradition several times, indicating his preference for Clement of Rome as the translator on the basis of literary similarity with I Clement, but also recording that there was a strong tradition in favor of Luke. Both Clement of Alexandria and Origen concur with this tradition that the Greek Hebrews is a translation (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3:37; 6:14; 6:25).

¹⁶ To this many would add the Gospel of John. Cf. C. F. Burney, *The Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1922) and *The Poetry of Our Lord* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1925). What is proposed here for Aramaic might even more cogently be proposed for Hebrew. In addition to this, even W. F. Howard (James Hope Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. II: *Accidence and Word Formation*, by W. F. Howard [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920] 484) says that "the solution of the tangled problem of the language of the Apocalypse is said to be this: (a) The author writes in Greek, thinks in Hebrew; (b) he has taken over some Greek sources already translated from the Hebrew; (c) he has himself translated and adapted some Hebrew sources." On the basis of "the instances of mistranslation corrected by retroversion" Howard leans toward the latter two suggestions. However, it appears that, when new advances in understanding the Hebrew of the period as well as early historical references about the composition of the Apocalypse are taken into account, the first of these suggested solutions is nearer the mark. The very Hebraic style of Revelation is most transparent.

rather inescapably to the conclusion that Hebrew is as important for the study of the NT as it is for the study of the OT (though certainly not to the exclusion of other languages and cultures which were influential in the period of the Second Temple).

It is interesting that the authors connect the theories of Markan priority and Aramaic backgrounds as well as the idea that the Greek Gospels represent "late, faulty transmission of oral reports recorded by the Greek speaking Church far removed from the unsophisticated Judean and Galilean scene" (p. 26) with "liberal" scholarship. It might be more to the point to say that the first two are almost universally assumed by NT scholarship of every brand, while at the least the oral aspect is tacitly assumed by many, both "liberal" and "conservative" alike. Bivin and Blizzard imply (though the point is not made as forcefully as it could be) that the gospels we have rest on written records, and that these records were made in the land of Jesus in the language of Jesus by people surrounded by the culture and religion of Jesus very shortly after the life of Jesus. This, in their opinion, makes the study of Hellenism and things Hellenistic (not to speak of Roman language, religion, and culture) very secondary indeed for the understanding of the gospels.¹⁷ Of course, it must first be established that Hebrew was the primary spoken medium of Jesus and his followers. Certainly Aramaic was used, but not as much as it was four or five centuries earlier by the returning captives from Aramaic-speaking Babylon. Aramaic was the language of the upper class and was well-known and used among scholars for certain purposes. But most of the literary indications extant today about the language of the common people of Jesus' day point toward Hebrew as the primary language in an undoubtedly bi-, tri-, or quadrilingual society (and no one living in multilingual Israel today can doubt the possibility and feasibility of such a thing in Jesus' day). The linguistic situation during that time is probably best described by the term "diglossia." This term is used to describe the well-known habit of multilingual speakers of speaking their various languages in different religious, social, economic, or political situations, which may vary as well with the particular geographical setting in which an utterance is made. The indications in favor of Hebrew are: (1) the languages used in the inscriptions on the cross (Greek, Latin, and Hebrew); (2) the large number of Hebrew words surviving in the NT (many more by actual count than Aramaic words); (3) the now better-understood fact that Hebrew works from the time (just as modern Israeli Hebrew scholarly works) contain Aramaisms, but that these do not point to Aramaic originals; and (4) most especially the astounding fact that much of the day-to-day Second Temple literature discovered at Qumran and

¹⁷ The debate about the "Hellenistic" or "Non-Hellenistic" background of the writers of the NT (including Paul) continues. C.F. e.g., on the Hellenistic side, Samuel Sandmel, *The Genius of Paul* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), and on Jewish side, W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (4th ed.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980). For a most stimulating recent approach to the religion of Paul, see E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977) and *Idem, Paul, the Law and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

Massada is in Hebrew. All of this, and especially the last point, is so overwhelming that even Matthew Black has had to concede that "if this is a correct estimate of the Qumran evidence [Wilcox's contention that Hebrew was a spoken Palestinian language in NT times], where Hebrew vastly predominates over Aramaic, then it may be held to confirm the view identified with the name of Professor Segal that Hebrew was actually a spoken vernacular in Judaea in the time of Christ."¹⁸

One of the most striking indications of Jesus' use of Hebrew comes from his words on the cross, **Hli hli lema sabaxqani** (Matt 27:46; see n. 14 above on the text). Although Mark 15:34 records them in Aramaic, **Elwi Elwi lema sabaxqani**, quoting the Targum to Psalm 22, the context seems to indicate that Jesus must have uttered them in Hebrew, because Eli (**Hli**, אֱלִי) was a shortened form of Eliyahu (**Hli aj**, אֱלִיָּהוּ, "Elijah," only in Hebrew, and the bystanders thought Jesus was calling for Elijah. But אֱלִיָּהוּ, the Aramaic (see Dan 6:23), could not have been mistaken for "Eliahu." Only Hebrew אֱלִי can account for the misunderstanding. Bivin and Blizzard could have pointed out the obvious psychological fact that the utterance of a man in pain and in the throes of death, without any doubt whatsoever would have been made in the language he was most accustomed to speaking. **Sabaxqani** may have been as much Mishnaic-like Hebrew as Aramaic, though it was certainly Aramaic in the first instance and would have come over into Hebrew only as a loanword—a distinct possibility in Jesus' time, considering the kind of literature in which it occurs.¹⁹ It is used enough now in Modern Hebrew to be considered genuine Hebrew by Even-Shoshan; it passed from loanword status to Hebrew status somewhere along the way.²⁰ Of course the Biblical Hebrew word in Psalm 22:1 is עֲנִיָּה. The word אֱלִיָּהוּ?, transliterated variously by Greek

¹⁸ M. Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (3rd ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1967) 47. Birkeland gives a convenient summary of the history of Aramaic and suggests a view of the relative importance of Aramaic and Hebrew as spoken languages in the time of Jesus similar to the one suggested above in this article (Harris Birkeland, *The Language of Jesus* [Oslo: I Kommissjon Hos Jacob Dybwad, 1954] 1-40). Some other important sources for the consideration of Aramaic vis-A-vis Hebrew are: B. Jongeling, C. J. Labuschagne, and A. S. Van der Woude, *Aramaic Texts from Qumran* Semitic Study Series, new series edited by J. H. Hospers, T. Jansma, and G. F. Pijper, vol. 1/4; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976); Jonas C. Greenfield, "Aramaic and Its Dialects," in *Jewish Languages*, ed. by Herbert H. Paper, pp.29-43; and E. Y. Kutscher, "Aramaic," *Encyclopedia Judaica* 3: cols. 259-87. Especially important is the evidence in favor of Mishnaic Hebrew as the spoken medium during the Second Temple period adduced by M. H. Segal, *A Grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1927) 1-20.

¹⁹ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1516-17.

²⁰ (ירושלים: קרית ספר) המילון העברי אברהם אבן-שושן 1323. James Barr's discussion of "Aramaisms" and Aramaic loanwords in Hebrew still remains one of the best on the subject. See his *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968) 121-24. For an explanation of and a listing of other Modern Hebrew borrowings from Aramaic, see Jonas C. Greenfield, "Aramaic and Its Dialects," in *Jewish Languages. Theme and Variations* ed. by Herbert H. Paper (Cambridge, MA: Association for Jewish Studies, 1978) 42.

manuscripts in the Matthew passage as **l ima**, **l ema**, and **l ama**, and in the Mark passage by the additional **meima**.²¹ The difference in pronunciation between the Aramaic and Hebrew would have been difficult to distinguish orally, so the language of the utterance probably hinges on the shortened form of Elijah.

Other convincing proofs for Hebrew as the spoken vernacular follow one upon another. Consider the account in the Talmud (Nedarim 66b)²² about the difficulties an Aramaic-speaking Jew from Babylon had in communicating with his Jerusalemite wife, who spoke Hebrew, or the findings of Flusser that of the hundreds of Semitic idioms in the Synoptic Gospels most can be explained on the basis of Hebrew only, while there "are no Semitisms which could only be Aramaic without also being good Hebrew" (p. 40). Or consider the opinion of Moshe Bar-Asher, the prominent Aramaic scholar at Hebrew University, that the Synoptics go back to an original Hebrew and not Aramaic. Joining in this train, according to Bivin and Blizzard, are Pinchas Lapide of Bar-Ilan University (Tel-Aviv), William Sanford LaSor (Fuller Seminary), Frank Cross (Harvard University), and J. T. Milik (pp. 40-43).

But for those familiar with the writings of the early Fathers this does not come as a total surprise. The testimony to an original Hebrew Gospel by Matthew is found from about A.D. 165 in Papias, through Irenaeus, Origen, Eusebius, Epiphanius, and most strikingly, Jerome (ca. 400). During his thirty-one years of translating in Bethlehem he wrote that

Matthew, also called Levi, apostle and aforesaid publican, composed a gospel of Christ at first published in Judea in Hebrew for the sake of those of the circumcision who believed, but this was afterwards translated into Greek though by what author is uncertain. The Hebrew itself has been preserved until the present day in the library at Caesarea which Pamphilus so diligently gathered. I have also had the opportunity of having the volume described to me by the Nazarenes of Beroea, a city of Syria, who use it. In this it is to be noted that wherever the Evangelist, whether on his own account or in the person of our Lord the Saviour quotes the testimony of the Old Testament he does not follow the authority of the translators of the Septuagint but the Hebrew. Wherefore these two forms exist, 'Out of Egypt have I called my son,' and 'for he shall be called a Nazarene.'²³

One of the common arguments for an Aramaic vernacular at the time of Jesus is the existence of targumim and the discovery of some of these Aramaic paraphrases at Qumran. But the targumim undoubtedly originated in a linguistic situation which preceded Jesus' time by at least a century and a half or more and which changed by the last days of the Second Temple. This can be seen by careful analysis of the writings of the Tannaim and Amoraim. Furthermore, the Aramaic targumim are outnumbered at Qumran by Greek translations, and few seriously contend that Greek was the primary spoken

²¹ Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 70, 119-20.

²² Babylonian Talmud (London: Soncino, 1936), Nedarim 66b, pp. 214-15.

²³ See n. 5 above for the other references. To these should be added Epiphanius, *Refutation of All Heresies*, 30.3.7. The complete quotation from Jerome can be found in Jerome, *Lives of Illustrious Men*, 3, in vol. 3 of the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, trans. by E. C. Richardson, ed. by P. Schaff and H. Ware, p. 362.

language of first century Israel. It is significant that the Pesharim (commentaries) found at Qumran are all in Hebrew. It is possible that it was the religious revival that occurred under Judas Maccabaeus after his cleansing of the Temple in December, 164 B.C. (for which Hannukkah is a commemoration), which was the impetus for the resurgence of Hebrew as the primary vernacular of Israel's Jews by the time of Jesus (p. 55).

Coins, inscriptions,²⁴ Rabbinic literature such as the Mishnah, and especially Rabbinic parables (there are about five thousand of these which survived in Hebrew and only two in Aramaic) all go to bolster the case for Hebrew as the vernacular of Second Temple Israel and thus of the documents behind the gospels.

But perhaps most telling are the gospels themselves, and in particular the Gospel of Luke, the Greek translation of which evidences transparently literalistic translation from a Hebrew original more often (and perhaps most surprisingly) than do either Mark or Matthew. These semitisms, most noticeable in syntax and idiomatic expressions (as would be the case with any literalistic translation) are not evenly spread throughout the book. They occur in blocks, most notably in direct statements attributed to Jesus or to his Jewish opponents. Some of these Hebraisms are so common and obvious that one scarcely needs to mention them, but for those unfamiliar with them, perhaps it is valuable to note a few. The constant **kai>egeneto + eñ + article + infinitive + subject of infinitive in the accusative + kai>+ main verb** obviously reflects ׀ת?׀ + preposition (usually ׀ or ׀) + infinitive construct + ׀ + main verb.²⁵ Thus, the repetitious use of - in narrative is reproduced as one of the outstanding characteristics of the gospels, a feature also apparent in literalistic English translations such as KJV or NASB, which retain the semitic syntax, even twice or three times removed.

It might be helpful to give an example of the ease with which many portions of Luke are returned to idiomatic Hebrew, often with few changes even in word order. One that Lindsey uses, Luke 22:67-70, is particularly excellent since it contains a common Rabbinic introduction to a disputation as well as allusions to two OT passages (and possibly a veiled reference to a third passage):

eĩsu-ei#kristoj, eĩpon hñiñ. eĩpen de>	אם אתה תמשיך אמר לנו
aufoij: eñ uñiñ eĩw, ouñh>pisteushte	וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם אִם אָמַר לְכֶם
eñ de>ełwthsu, ouñh>apokrihte	לֹא תֵאֱמָרוּ וְאִם אֲשַׁאֵל לֹא תַעֲנוּ
apo touñuñ de>etai oñiñj tou?ahtqrwpou	וּמַעַתָּה יְהִי בְרַ אַנְשׁ יוֹשֵׁב
kaqhænoj eķdeciwñ thj dunænewj tou?eou?	לִימִין הַגְּבוּרָה...
eĩpan de>pantej: su>ou# ei#ñiñj tou?eou?	וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָלֶם אֶתְהָ אִפּוֹא בָן
ołdeproj aufouj e#h: uñeij legete oti eķw<	הָאֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם אֶתֶם
eĩni.	אוֹמְרִים כִּי אֲנִי הוּא

²⁴ Francis E. Peters has cautioned against giving too much weight to coins for deciding the languages of Palestine during this period (Francis E. Peters, "Response," in *Jewish Languages. Theme and Variations*, 161).

²⁵ As recognized by Nigel Turner, who calls this construction a "Semitism" (James Hope Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. 3: *Syntax*, by Nigel Turner [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963] 144-46). See also his long listing of other semitisms, pp. 398-99.

Lindsey's explanation of this passage is a good example of the kind of work that is being done by those studying the gospels from the standpoint of their Hebrew and Jewish background:

As in all of Luke it is not Jesus who uses the word Messiah about himself; this word is employed by the chief priests who are trying to get Jesus to "level" with them and confess the thing his actions and speech have long hinted at but not made explicit. Faced with hostile interrogators who are nevertheless conscious of their duty to get the facts Jesus does "level" with them by pointedly telling them that he cannot expect them to believe the truth if he says it and that he cannot even "ask" them anything; this last is a reference to the accepted rabbinic procedure in debate: the one asked a question is allowed to ask a question in return. But rather than leave things at an impasse Jesus then makes a statement which can only leave his hearers following the patterns of rabbinic exegesis to try to make out what he means. "The Son of Man" is a Messianic title they know full well from Daniel 7.13,14 and the "seated at the right hand" they easily identify as a reference to Messianic Psalm 110. Jesus' expression "the Power" is another accommodation to the rabbinic habit of replacing an ordinary name for the deity by an evasive synonym. But of even more interest is the seeming addition in the priestly expression "the Son of God." Here, as Professor Flusser once pointed out to me, the explanation seems to be in the way the rabbis connected Psalm 110 with Psalm 2 by reading verse 3 of the former as הַיְהוָה לֵאמֹר לְעַבְדִּי (cf. the LXX) which is the same verb found in Psalm 2:7. They answer therefore: "You are then the Son of God!" and of course mean, "You are, then, the Messiah!" Jesus answers, "It is you who are saying that I am he!"²⁶

Bivin and Blizzard point out such common Hebrew idioms in the gospels. as "he lifted up his eyes and saw," "Heaven," in "Kingdom of Heaven" as a substitute term for God for fear of violation of the third commandment;²⁷ and the idiom "to come/be near," as the equivalent of "to be present" (i.e., "the Kingdom of God is here," not "near"). Bivin and Blizzard's equation of the word "judgment" with "salvation" instead of with "destruction" may not be as well chosen, even though this may occasionally be the way to translate the word in the OT.

Even Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker recognize a number of these idioms, while, perhaps, not fully appreciating their significance since the bulk of their work (and Bauer's) was completed before the important implications of the Qumran discoveries came to be appreciated. Still they list a number of idioms with a semitic background both in the introduction to the lexicon as well as in the text itself.²⁸ They do at least recognize the influence of the LXX on NT Greek syntax, and there can be no doubt where the LXX got its syntax. Still, one is not quite prepared for the superlative in which they express it. "As for the influence of the LXX, every page of this lexicon shows that it outweighs all other influences on our literature."²⁹ While this statement may be hyperbole, these lexiconographers are definitely on the mark

²⁶Lindsey, *A Hebrew Translation of the Gospel of Mark*, xx-xi.

²⁷Cf. Bruce D. Chilton, *A Galilean Rabbi and His Bible* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1984) 78.

²⁸BAGD, xix-xxv

²⁹BAGD, xxi

about one thing: the NT is full of semitic syntax, vocabulary, idioms, and thought patterns. Perhaps in the case of the Synoptics, however, this should not be traced so much to the influence of a Hebrew-to-Greek translation of the OT, as a Hebrew-to-Greek translation of documents which lie behind these gospels. In any case, the point is that the Hebrew influence is there, and this fact coupled with other factors already mentioned in this article once again points to Hebrew as the linguistic background for the gospels. As for the actual listing of the Hebrew expressions and idioms in the gospels, the 72-page-long list in Moulton-Howard, vol. 2 (where the whole scope of the NT is covered) is only a beginning;³⁰ there are many more which are most apparent to someone who wears the glasses of Hebrew fluency to see them.

The Process of Composition

One of the more controversial parts of the book by Bivin and Blizzard will be their discussion of the process of composition of the gospels. Although there is very little in the canonical writings which explains the actual process of writing down the stories, or the mechanics of inspiration, there are ideas about composition and inspiration which have come to be almost canonical!

It is undoubtedly worthwhile to remind ourselves just what is actually known. As for the composition of the gospels, only Luke tells us his method: he used written sources (Luke 1:1-4). He undoubtedly had oral sources as well, but he does not say that he did. Early church historians suggest rather often that Paul was an oral source for Luke and that very well may have been true to some extent.³¹ As for the mechanics of inspiration, the Bible gives no explanation at all. And the situation is complicated even more by the fact that the foundations of currently popular views on inspiration among American evangelicals, the "autograph," is something neither mentioned in the NT, nor in any of the discussions of inspiration and canonicity in the first centuries of the Church.³² This is notable because there is an obvious question which arises from the early church accounts that the Greek Gospel of Matthew and the Greek book of Hebrews are translations: what is an autograph? Or, more to the point, which was the autograph then in the case of these books: the Hebrew original or the Greek translation? The same question might arise out of Luke's report that he used written sources for his gospel, as well as the suggestions of Bivin and Blizzard about the composition of the Synoptics. On the one hand both our conceptions of canonicity and the content of the Canon are entirely dependent upon the tradition of the Church Fathers.³³

³⁰ Moulton and Howard, *Grammar*, vol. 2, 413-85.

³¹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.1; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 6.24.

³² Liddell and Scott list only Dionysius Halicarnassensis and Plutarch as users of the word (*LSJ*, 279). *BAGD* does not list the word. It is true, of course, that the concept does not depend upon the use of this particular word, but I can find no such concept connected with inerrancy during the early centuries of the church.

³³ The main canon lists are: The Muratorian Canon (ca. 2nd century); Eusebius (4th century); Cyril of Jerusalem (A.D. 349); Apostolic Canons (4th century); Codex Alexandrinus (4th century); Council of Laodicea (A.D. 363); Council of Carthage (A.D. 397); the African Code (A.D. 419); and Jerome (A.D. 420). None except Jerome

the other hand the Fathers neither raise nor answer the question of "autographs," since they were not, apparently, concerned with them or even aware of the concept as it is used today, even though they spoke freely about the fact that some of the NT books were translations. Thus, an answer to the question, "what is an autograph" is not immediately apparent, but it is a crucial question for the doctrine of inerrancy, since inerrancy is claimed only for "the autographs." Bivin and Blizzard raise the question only by implication and thus do not suggest an answer.

With this background, then, we come to the propositions of Bivin and Blizzard about the composition of the Synoptics. They outline four steps in the process of the preservation and transmission of the gospel stories. Naturally, these steps are hypothetical. Of course this must be the case with any reconstruction based on a particular theory, such as the currently popular theory of Markan priority. Since any theory of composition is based on a long series of inferences, no matter what hypothesis one prefers, one is still working in the dark. In the end a theory of composition must be judged on the basis of how many questions it answers and problems it solves, weighed against the questions it does not answer and the problems it does not solve. Bivin and Blizzard believe that their alternative to Markan priority answers more questions and solves more problems while at the same time leaving unsolved and unanswered less than does the theory of Markan priority.

Step one occurred within five years of the death and resurrection of Jesus, when his words were recorded in Hebrew. Bivin and Blizzard estimate that this "Life of Jesus" was about 30-35 chapters long. Notice that they postulate a very early written account, as opposed to the widely held theory that the raw material of the gospels is late and oral.

Step two according to Bivin and Blizzard involved the translation of the Hebrew "Life of Jesus" into Greek in order to supply the demand for it in Greek-speaking churches outside of Israel. The translation was, like the translation of the LXX, slavishly literal, and "since books translated from Hebrew into Greek are much longer in Greek, it was about 50-60 chapters in length" (p. 94).

Step three followed only a few years later when, "probably at Antioch, the stories, and frequently elements within the stories, found in this Greek translation were separated from one another and then these fragments were arranged topically, perhaps to facilitate memorization. (What remained were fragments that were often divorced from their original and more meaningful contexts)" (pp. 94-95). There are a number of clear instances of "fragmentation" in the gospels which Bivin and Blizzard did not point out. An example may be seen by comparing Matthew's "Sermon on the Mount" with the fragments of it scattered throughout Luke. My own computer-assisted analysis of the approximately 390 sections (using the divisions of the UBS Greek NT), for example, has demonstrated that large sections of the material found

agrees completely with our canon. Most of these are conveniently gathered and cited in their original Greek or Latin (except the Muratorian fragment, which is undoubtedly a translation) in B. F. Westcott, *A General Survey of the History of the Canon of the New Testament* (7th ed.; London: Macmillan, 1896) 530-68.

in Matthew 5, 6, and 7 in one "sermon" are found in six different places in Luke (6, II, 12, 13, 14, 16) in addition to shorter sections found elsewhere. Some of this difference in arrangement of material is undoubtedly a reflection of Jesus' repetition of his words in slightly different form to different audiences in different places at different times and in different contexts. But some of it might also support the contention of Bivin and Blizzard that a certain amount of fragmentation and displacement occurred between the time that the stories were originally committed to writing and the time that they were arranged in the form in which we have them now.³⁴ This displacement of stories from their contexts may be clearly seen by comparing accounts of the same stories in the Synoptics. One example which will clearly illustrate the point is the healing story found beginning in Luke 4:40, Mark 1:32, and Matthew 8: 16. In Luke and Mark the phrase "when it was evening," or "when the sun had gone down" makes sense in those two books since the story is set in the context of Shabbat (the Sabbath); and of course the Jews had to wait until Shabbat was over before they could do any work such as bringing sick people to Jesus to be healed. But in Matthew the same story (as well as the healing of Peter's mother-in-law) is set in a different context with nothing either preceding or following it about Shabbat. Hence in Matthew the phrase "when evening came" has been separated from its original context and one must go to the parallels in Luke and Mark to recover its full meaning. Step four in the composition of our Synoptics according to Bivin and Blizzard was the stage at which a fluent Greek author used this topically arranged text, reconstructed its fragmented elements and stories to produce a gospel with some chronological order (either explicit or implicit), and thus created still another document. "This author, even before our Matthew, Mark, and Luke, was the first to struggle with a reconstruction of the original order of the story units (represented by steps one and two). In the process of reconstruction, he improved its (step three's) grammatically poor Greek, as well as shortening it considerably" (p. 95).

According to this theory of the composition of the gospels, Luke wrote first and used only the "topical" text (step three) and the "reconstructed text" (step four). Mark followed Luke's work (both Luke's Gospel and his Acts, as Lindsey points out)³⁵ and Matthew used Mark's. Mark and Matthew had access to the "topical" text (step three) as well, but none of the synoptic writers had access to the original Hebrew "Life of Jesus" (step one) or the first Greek translation of that "Life" (step two). Matthew did not use Luke directly.³⁶ Bivin and Blizzard also suggest that Matthew wrote the original Hebrew "Life of Jesus" as all of the Church Fathers who speak on the matter in the first 400 years of church history contend, but the extant Matthew was

³⁴Cf. Lindsey, *A Hebrew Translation of the Gospel of Mark*, xxii-xxvi; Joachim Jeremias, *The Sermon on the Mount*, trans. by Norman Perrin (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963) 13-33.

³⁵Lindsey, *A Hebrew Translation of the Gospel of Mark*, 39. To this Lindsey adds Mark's verbal dependence upon James, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Corinthians, and Romans (p. 52).

³⁶*Ibid.*, xviii.

not done by him, and his name came to be associated with it because of its evidently Jewish tone and the tradition that Matthew wrote his in Hebrew. While it is true that our Gospel of Matthew does not itself say who wrote it, and we thus rely entirely on the tradition of Church History for this conclusion, the tradition itself is so pervasive that there seems to be no good reason to deny it. Matthew's Hebrew "Life of Jesus" is connected with the disciple by that name as late as Jerome, who, as we noted above, says that a copy of it in Hebrew was still in the library in Caesarea in his day. But even Jerome admits that no one knows or even suggests who might have translated the Hebrew Gospel into Greek.

In any event the priority of Luke is the heart of the burden of Bivin and Blizzard and in this they are merely summarizing decades of work by Lindsey, which Lindsey himself conveniently outlines in a most convincing manner in the introduction to his translation of Mark. NT scholars in the West have yet seriously to interact with it, perhaps in many cases because they simply do not know about it. It is most unfortunate that the book was originally published in Israel, that its title does not indicate the full scope of the important material it presents, and it has not been widely advertised. These factors have undoubtedly led to its obscurity.

Reconstruction

Some of the scholars in Israel who have spent a lifetime studying the Synoptics have themselves attempted to reconstruct some of the fragmented stories and teachings by combining elements from the various gospels which can be related through key words. Bivin and Blizzard give one example of this with a reconstruction of the Mary and Martha story, combining elements from Luke 10, Matthew 6 = Luke 12, and Luke 16. Thus, Martha's complaint about Mary's neglect of her share of the work precedes Jesus' teachings on worry gathered from several places. These are followed by the story of the rich man who tore down his barns to build bigger ones. Then the story is concluded with the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

Of all of the innovations in the book, this is the one which may be hardest to accept. In fact, the entire chapter would probably have been better left out of the book. Such reconstruction, one might argue, may be the next logical step after one has recognized that some stories are fragmented. Gospel harmonies actually amount to this. But there is still a lingering feeling that what we have is what we have, and that we should leave it as it is. Each canonical gospel has come down to us in a form which has value and significance just as it is. Each must in the end stand on its own merits. Comparison of the Synoptics for the purpose of understanding parallel stories is one thing (and must be done at a deeper level than mere lexical similarity); comparison of the Synoptics for the purpose of reconstruction is quite another. It is not that it is any more theologically dangerous or disrespectful of the gospels than, e.g., Gospel Harmonies or the numbers in the Eusebian and Ammonian Canon Tables. It is simply a question of whether extensive reconstruction on the basis of a few similar words or thoughts is really convincing or helpful.

Retroversion and Retranslation

"Theological error due to mistranslation" takes up the next section of the book. These "theological errors" according to Bivin and Blizzard are "pacificism," "giving without discernment," and the "theology of martyrdom." The arguments are made rather convincingly, but they may not convince everyone. This section is followed by an appendix in which Bivin discusses individual verses and phrases and explains them from their Hebrew/Jewish background. For the less trained reader this section will undoubtedly be the most interesting. For the trained reader this section is the test of whether the idea of Hebrew backgrounds to the gospels is a good solution for difficulties of translation and interpretation. If a few of the flaws, such as the use of the King James Version instead of the Greek text, can be overlooked, almost anyone can find help here with some of the most impenetrable sayings of Jesus. The first saying which Bivin discusses is "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Here Bivin points out that this verse intends to teach that God's followers are made up of the spiritually "down and out," who are humble enough to let God save them.

Luke 23:31, "For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" is explained against the background of Ezekiel's prophecy against Jerusalem and its Temple in Ezek 20:45-21:7. Jesus identifies himself with the "Green Tree," a Messianic symbol of the times and the "Dry Tree" with the people of Jerusalem who would face a worse fate than Jesus at the hands of the Romans. Bivin suggests that "in" should be "against" (no doubt going back to an original Hebrew). Not only does the verse finally make sense, but it shows once again, as Bivin says, that "Jesus seems hardly ever to have spoken without somehow or in some way making a messianic claim," even though he never comes right out and says "I am the Messiah" in the Synoptics.

Bivin finds the key to Matt 11: 12, "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force," by comparing a rabbinic midrash of Mic 2:13, a connection pointed out by Flusser. It appears that Jesus is here taking a Messianic interpretation from the literature (whether oral or written) of his culture, perhaps altering it slightly, and subtly using it to make a messianic claim.

Bivin next takes up Luke 12:49-50: "I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled? But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished." This enigmatic statement is the occasion for the most lengthy and fascinating explanation that Bivin offers. By comparing the verse with Matt 3:11 and Isa 66:15-16, and by explaining the many Hebraisms latent in the verse, Bivin shows that it is better translated,

I have come to cast fire upon the earth,
 But how could I wish it [the earth] were already burned up?
 I have a baptism to baptize,
 And how distressed I am till it is over!

In his discussion of Matt 16:19, "Whatsoever you shall bind (or loose) on earth shall be bound (or loosed) in heaven," Bivin shows that understanding the Hebrew background of the saying would lead to the translation "allow" and "disallow" for this very common rabbinic phrase. He also shows how this authority was applied at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, at which James both "loosed," i.e., allowed the believers not to be circumcised and not to keep the whole law, and "bound," i.e., disallowed idolatry, cult prostitutes, and eating meat from which the blood had not been removed (Lev 7:26). Matt 5:20, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven," is illuminated by the insight that the הקדוּשָׁה of the Pharisees had been reduced to almsgiving, and Jesus was calling for a greater הקדוּשָׁה , God's הקדוּשָׁה (righteousness).

Matt 5:17-18, "Do not think that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say to you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled," is explained by showing the typical Hebrew rabbinic phrases employed in this statement evidently aimed at other rabbis. The Hebrew idiom "I have come" obviously means "it is my purpose to," and the terms "destroy" and "fulfill" were commonly employed in Jesus' day as technical terms in rabbinic argumentation. "When a rabbi felt that his colleague had misinterpreted a passage of Scripture, he would say, 'You are destroying the Law.' Needless to say, in most cases his colleague strongly disagreed. What was 'destroying the Law' for one rabbi, was 'fulfilling the Law' (correctly interpreting Scripture) for another" (p. 154). Thus, it is Jesus' method of interpretation that is under consideration here. Hence, to paraphrase, he is saying "never imagine for a moment that I intend to abrogate the Law by misinterpreting it. My intent is not to weaken or negate the Law, but by properly interpreting God's Written Word I aim to establish it, that is, make it even more lasting. I would never invalidate the Law by effectively removing something from it through interpretation. Heaven and earth would sooner disappear than something from the Law. Not the smallest letter in the alphabet, the yod nor even its decorative spur, will ever disappear from the Law" (p. 155).

Bivin goes on to show that Luke 6:22, "cast your name as evil" is simply a literalistic translation of the Hebrew idiom meaning, "to defame (publicly) you." Luke 9:29, "the appearance of his face was altered," a phrase appearing twice in rabbinic literature, is shown to be a subtle messianic claim. Luke 9:44, "lay these sayings in your ears" is a Hebrew expression familiar to any reader of Biblical Hebrew.

One often hears that the expression "he set his face to go" in Luke 9:51 demonstrates Jesus' resolve to go to Jerusalem, but Bivin correctly points out that this expression has nothing to do with resolve, but is only a Hebrew idiom which means "turned in the direction of."

One final example of sayings of Jesus better understood through recognition of the Hebrew and Jewish background of the gospels is offered. It is

the saying in Luke 10:5-6: "Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Shalom be to this house.' And if a son of shalom is there, your shalom shall rest upon him; but if not, it shall return to you," Bivin would paraphrase this "When you are invited into a home, let your first act be to say, 'Peace to this family!' If the head of the house turns out to be truly friendly and hospitable [a 'son of peace'], let the blessing, 'Peace,' you pronounced when you entered his house remain upon his family. If he is not friendly, withdraw your blessing [and move to another house]" (p, 168). Bivin compares Jesus' instruction here to similar blessing used by other rabbis: "Shalom to you, shalom to your house [i.e. 'family'], and shalom to everything you own" (p. 169).

With this the book closes, but it does not close the discussion it is likely to engender. The core of ideas which the book presents represent an opportunity for NT scholars to make a real advance in the understanding of the gospels, and the book ought to be taken seriously even though it is in a popular style and is defective literarily, typographically, and especially in the many assertions which are not supported by sufficient documentation. The trained critical reader should not presume that lack of documentation in the book means that documentation is not available. One may suppose that some of this lack of documentation is a result of the popular style the authors chose in order to reach a larger audience. It may also be that after having lived and worked among speakers of Hebrew the authors came to assume many things which are obvious to someone fluent in Hebrew and very conversant with Jewish culture and history, but not to those who do not have such a background. Or they may have simply underestimated the degree to which NT studies in Western Europe and America have remained comfortably unaware of the original linguistic and cultural setting of our Synoptic Gospels. It is also possible that they did not fully realize the extent to which American conservative Christianity is so much more dependent upon the fourteen epistles of Paul, the Gospel of John, and the Apocalypse. The Synoptics are largely untouched in American conservative Christianity, except for portions which contain the infancy narratives, the narratives of the last days of Jesus on earth, and a few scattered eschatological references. In contrast to the early Christians whose favorite gospel seems to have been it: Matthew, there is no doubt that American conservatives today prefer John, In contrast to early Christians who placed much more emphasis on the teachings of Jesus, American conservatives emphasize the epistles of Paul. Without making a judgment on the reasons for or the rightness or wrongness of these phenomena, it is sufficient in the present case to remark that these facts alone portend a resistance to the suggestions of Bivin and Blizzard. The lack of familiarity with the Synoptics on the part of a major segment of the Christian community in the West will mean that few will even see the significance of their suggestions and fewer still will be capable of evaluating them. This is not to say that everything that is suggested in the book will be acceptable even to those who are capable of such evaluation. Unfortunately, the tone of some of the statements in the book places the forum for discussion of the merits of its ideas on the very level where no questions of theology or biblical

scholarship are finally decided: the level of polemics and assertion. I can only hope that in a future edition of this book or perhaps in another book the authors will offer more documentation from the many sources that are available, and that they will present this evidence in a format that will appeal more to scholars. But if one can look past this defect to the ideas themselves, he will find a tool for the recovery of the background of the Synoptics which will make them live, and thus, in my opinion, make them a much more powerful corrective for human lives. To be realistic, however, it must be admitted that Bivin and Blizzard (as well as Lindsey, Flusser, Safrai, Lapide, and others) are going against much of the mainstream of Western Synoptic studies; but perhaps the stream needs to ask itself whether it is really flowing in the right direction.

It remains, finally, for each student of the Synoptics to remind himself, as he should do periodically, that it is possible to worry so much about what kind of material was used to build the house, who put it there, when it was put there, and how and why it was put there, that the beauty of the finished house itself is missed; but if the point of the study of gospel composition continues to be the better understanding of the difficult words of Jesus and the more incisive application of them as a corrective for human behavior, then the enterprise remains not only beneficial but obligatory.

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