

# Greek versus Jewish backgrounds to Systematic Theology

I have dealt with this issue before, in a couple of papers, from a historical and from a Biblical standpoint [see, *'The twin problems affecting the early church' and 'A simple catechism on the Jewish Root error'*.] The problem before us is the rise of Jewish Root heresies seeking to Judaize the church (just as occurred in the early church). A recent emphasis of this has been that the early church fell into error because all the key early church fathers (theologians) were academically trained in Greek methods and imposed an intellectual Hellenistic approach on Biblical doctrine that was far removed from its original Hebrew base. These false teachers seek to remove all intellectualism and systematisation from theology and replace it with Hebrew (or rather rabbinic) ideas that are amorphous, generalised, subjective and mostly heretical.

Jacob Prasch and Steve Maltz are practitioners of this theory (with many others) and an example is the theme of a proposed conference in October 2011 by a friend who has succumbed to this error. His conference advertising states:

*In their approach to scripture, the Early Church Fathers imposed Greek thinking and philosophy on a Jewish book thereby obscuring the Christian Church's subsequent understanding of how God's Word itself asks to be embraced, understood and interpreted. This led to the erroneous and unbiblical idea that Biblical truth should be understood primarily intellectually through the ongoing development of various (contradictory and competing) systematic theologies and doctrinal systems, an approach which scripture itself knows nothing of and has never taught. ... The Hellenistic (Greek) approach of using logic and rational systematization to deduce concepts merely intellectually on an academic and theoretical level should never be used in isolation by themselves.*

There is so much error in this statement that it is hard to know where to begin (see conclusion). Jewish Root teachers mostly fight against Calvinism, which they perceive to be dry, intellectual and dead. This is a false caricature and, in fact, quite a facile statement. History is replete with examples proving the opposite, but in today's church where people know little or no church history these false teachers get away with murder.

Furthermore no truly Reformed (i.e. Calvinist) theologian embraces Biblical study in a dry intellectual fashion but seeks to look to God himself for revelation in understanding Biblical doctrines. Thus prayer, meditation, and humility accompany genuine Reformed intellectual study, along with peer discussion. The problem with Jewish Root teachers (and many other heretics) is that they base their ideas on subjectivism, which is open to any wind of demonic doctrine, or worse, the ideas of unbelieving rabbis who hate Christ. In essence the Jewish Root movement is trying to push a modern Pharisaism upon believers, of the sort that Christ continually condemned.

Another key matter which Jewish Root teachers completely ignore is the role of the Holy Spirit in developing doctrine. Looking to men in the form of rabbis, they reject the development of doctrine throughout church history by the gift of men to the church empowered by the Spirit to bring teaching and correction to equip the saints for ministry. This was in fulfilment of the promise of Christ that the Spirit would lead the disciples into all truth, a promise which continues to be fulfilled to this very day.

Thus throughout church history, and often caused by a contemporary heresy needing confrontation, the Spirit brought increasing clarity on doctrinal issues, often at great cost to the men involved. Athanasius alone was exiled five times by the emperor in defending the doctrine of the person of Christ; others (like Gottschalk) lost their freedom and their lives. This increasing guidance of the Spirit led to ever more detailed, scholastic development of doctrine; and this was a good thing. Those who disparage the detailed development of doctrine are fools whose system (everyone has one) is so full of holes that it can accommodate anything at all.

Detailed instruction is vital. Take, for instance, a recipe. What is more valuable? A recipe that just lists the ingredients and tells you how you should feel when you eat it or a recipe that gives full directions on how much of the ingredient, how to mix, how long to cook, how to prepare etc. Systematised, clearly described, thoroughly Biblical doctrine is vital for development in grace. If people do not know exactly what to believe they will believe anything they are told without question and will swallow every demonic idea going (and there are a great many of them today).

Now all this is merely introductory. What I want to describe in this paper is a fundamental truth regarding Paul's ministry. Now I have elsewhere proved that the early church was steeped in Greek language, idioms and cultural ideas as a result of God's sovereignty. This was to enable the proper flow of God's ideas to many nations; thus he gave success to Alexander the Great to pave the way for a worldwide language and culture to unify the nations around the Mediterranean Sea and beyond.

Far from the early church being based in Hebrew language, idioms and culture (as claimed by Jewish Root teachers), the early church was rooted in Hellenistic thought. There was a short period (roughly the early-middle part of Acts) where there was an influential Hebrew party in the church; but there was always a Greek party and the Hebrew faction gradually disappeared, only to reform as the heresy Ebionism. The reason for this was that God's grace is not culturally bound. It is neither Jewish nor Greek but universal. The influence of Hellenistic ideas was merely to enable a better communication of God's truth across nations.

Now regarding Paul. My contention here is that Paul was chiefly engaged in Greek and not Jewish forms of communication and method. Not only was the early church founded upon Greek language and methods, not only were the early fathers reliant upon Greek training, but Paul chose to use Greek idioms and methods also.

## **The Jewish background at the time of the NT**

This time is often described as 'The Second Temple Period', i.e. the age when Herod's temple was in use, which includes the lifetime of Jesus and the ministry of the apostles up to 70AD when the temple was destroyed. The Jews at this time were divided into two distinct camps.

### **Palestine**

The Palestinian Jews were much more centred upon Hebraic thought and forms. However, even in Palestine very few people spoke Hebrew in everyday life. Formal life, and especially religious ritual, was conducted in Hebrew but the ordinary Jews spoke Aramaic and had done since some time after the Babylonian exile.<sup>1</sup> Note that Paul only spoke in Hebrew for

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<sup>1</sup> 'Certainly the mother tongue of most Palestinian Jews was Aramaic.' David A Fiensy, 'The composition of the Jerusalem church' in *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting*, Volume 4, Palestinian setting, Ed. Richard Bauckham; p230.

emphasis when confronting Jewish priests (Acts 22:2). Jesus spoke in a Galilean dialect of Aramaic not Hebrew (Matt 26:73; Mk 5:41, 7:34).

Now Aramaic is a Syrian dialect and not the property of Jews alone, but of many tribes. Indeed, certain parts of the OT are written in Aramaic (what used to be called Chaldee, such as Ezra 4:8-6:18, 7:12-26; Jer 10:11; Dan 2:4-7:28). Aramaic originated as the diplomatic language of the Assyrian Empire and then of the Babylonian and Medo-Persian Empire.

Aramaic idioms can be detected by philologists under the Greek form of the Gospels (cf. Mk 4:12) but there is no evidence of an early Aramaic form of the Gospels; they were written in Greek – the universal language of the Mediterranean area. The idea that the Gospels were originally written in Hebrew is folly and without any substantiation at all. In addition, a number of supposed Hebrew idioms in the rest of the NT have been found to actually be of Greek origin not Hebrew. The amount of Hebrew influence in the form of the NT is much less than supposed.

But many Palestinian Jews also spoke Greek, especially the middle classes and the wealthy. Coins were minted with Greek inscriptions and even those who spoke Hebrew and Aramaic used Greek loan words. Many Palestinian Jews had Greek names; the architecture shows Greek influences and the government was Greek. Even tomb and ossuary inscriptions were chiselled in Greek.

The centre of Judaism is, of course, Jerusalem and this was the site of the first church. But even here the Hebrew influence was only one of many others. The cosmopolitan city was a macrocosm of pluralistic society composed of many forms: rich and poor, upper class and lower class, craftsmen, artisans, rulers, religious societies, and so on. Most of the Jews here actually grew up in the Diaspora and were strongly influenced by Hellenistic ideas. There was a substantial element of Greek-speaking Jews and many Jews in Jerusalem sought to be as Greek as possible in order to appear refined and satisfy career ambitions. The language spoken in Jerusalem was of three sorts: there were Aramaic speakers only, Greek speakers only and people bilingual in the two. Hebrew was reserved for formal situations and many Jews could not speak or write it. Indeed, Jerusalem was the most important centre for the Greek language in Jewish Palestine.

The early church appears to be a reflection of this pluralistic society. [Note the wide variety of language groups represented in the earliest converts in Acts. Jewish speakers were quickly outnumbered.]

So, the Hebrew base of the Jews in Palestine had a great many Greek and Aramaic forms and influences and was not just Hebrew.

### **The Diaspora**

This is the technical term for Jewish communities outside Palestine from 100BC to 100 AD, the period of the NT. The word means; 'dispersion' and is transliterated from the Greek (see Jn 7:35). So the very terminology for the majority of NT Jewish communities is Greek.

These communities began to be constructed after the Babylonian exile and continued after a portion of the Jews returned to Jerusalem under Nehemiah. Thus there were deportations to Assyria and Babylonia between 8<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC and later migrations to Egypt from 525BC. Many communities, especially in Babylonia, became prosperous and this led to expansion into various cities throughout the Roman Empire. On occasion they threatened the local population and were expelled, such as from Rome by Claudius in the time of Paul (in 49 AD). This expansion resulted in Jews being an estimated 10% of the population of the Roman Empire.

During the Greek Empire the Diaspora Jews gradually adopted the Greek language in order to better communicate and conduct business with Gentiles. Indeed, many Jews sought to be as Greek as possible, since this was associated with culture and respect. In the third century BC Jews decided that they needed a Greek translation of the OT. This was completed by 132BC and become known as the 'Septuagint' [Latin for '70', hence the abbreviation, LXX] because it was supposed to have been written by seventy elders. The version was produced for Ptolemy II and placed in the Alexandrian library. The Jewish communities quickly adopted this version as their normal choice. There is also evidence of a number of other local Greek translations.

So, the vast majority of Jewish people did not live in Palestine, did not speak Hebrew and did not use a Hebrew OT. Indeed, they adopted Greek culture and aspired to be as Greek as possible to succeed.

By the time of Paul, 'Greekness' had been an intrinsic part of Judaism for some centuries. Around the Roman Empire lived Jews who knew no Hebrew, spoke no Aramaic, and lived their lives, heard their Bible, and did their reading in Greek – and ... contributed significantly to the evolving hellenism of their environments.

Tessa Rajak, 'The location of cultures in second temple Palestine: The evidence of Josephus', in *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting*, Volume 4, Palestinian setting, Ed. Richard Bauckham; p4-5.

### **Interim conclusion**

So, even before the beginnings of the Christian church, the Jewish situation was predominantly Hellenistic. Normal communication was not in Hebrew, either in writing or in speech. Why would the early church, born into this situation, go against the grain and seek to write in Hebrew, speak in Hebrew, establish doctrines in Hebrew, and use Hebrew idioms and philosophy? Especially when the majority of the early church was not even Jewish but chiefly comprised of Greek speaking Gentiles.

The whole idea is a nonsense and it is shocking that anyone can fall for it.

## **The composition of the early church**

The Jerusalem church was distinguished into two camps just as Jews were, Hebrew and Hellenists (cf. Acts 6:1). The Jews spoke Aramaic and probably Greek (perhaps a few were able to speak Hebrew but this would be of no advantage in fellowship) and the Hellenists spoke Greek. The Hellenists comprised of Palestinian Jews who only spoke Greek as well as converted Jewish proselytes and converts directly from outside Palestine. The Jewish faction was overwhelmed in numbers within a few years. The church then was essentially pluralistic, just as Jerusalem was. It was not dominated by Jewish thinking at all.

Outside Palestine all the churches would have been essentially Hellenistic. Even when Jews were converted these would have been Greek speaking Hellenistic Jews.

Without doubt, the chief influence in the early universal church was not Hebrew but Greek in language, culture and expression.

## **What about Paul?**

### **Paul's importance in establishing the background to dogmatics**

It is important to understand the importance of Paul in establishing Biblical doctrine. Paul's letters alone occupy the majority of apostolic writings. But Paul also had a

significant influence on the Gospels through his colleagues Luke and Mark, and also was the force behind the history of Acts. God did not choose an overt Hebrew such as Matthew to write most of the NT. He did not choose Aramaic speaking Jews such as John or Peter to do this. He chose a Jew that was raised up as a Roman citizen, educated originally under a Greek culture in Tarsus and then finishing his education in the heart of Jerusalem under a famous rabbi (Acts 22:3). Paul himself represents the universalism of God's elect.

### **Paul's background**

Without any doubt Paul was Hellenistic Jew; he was not of the Hebraic Jewish faction but was culturally Greek.

Paul himself must be called a Hellenist; because the language of his infancy was that idiom of the Grecian Jews in which all his letters were written.<sup>2</sup>

In religious terms he could describe himself as a Hebrew born of Hebrews (Phil 3:5) due to his zeal for the Jewish faith before his conversion [note that after his conversion he considers this to be dung, Phil 3:8<sup>3</sup>] but in cultural terms Paul was Hellenistic. When Paul quotes the OT he uses the Greek Septuagint version, not only when he cites the verses but also when he quotes it from memory.<sup>4</sup> This is important to our thesis; Paul leaned upon Greek and not Hebrew sources. Despite being trained by Gamaliel, Paul leaned upon his earlier education in Greek.

Paul was proud of originating in Tarsus in Cilicia and they are mentioned five times in Paul's testimony in Acts (Acts 9:11, 30, 11:35, 21:39, 22:3). Paul declares himself to be a citizen of Tarsus (Acts 21:39). This must have originated from his father or grandfather and was extremely difficult to come by since Jews did not enjoy political equality in Tarsus and foreigners were only granted citizenship with difficulty. Paul's status as a Roman citizen is a separate issue; Paul was a citizen of the Roman Empire and also a citizen of the Roman city of Tarsus; these make Paul of high social status, something he used to advantage in his trials. This already elevates Paul's non-Hebrew connections far above all the other apostles.

There are good grounds to believe that Paul's earliest education was in Tarsus and was thus Hellenistic. There was a university in Tarsus noted for its courses on philosophy and medicine. Paul handles everyday Greek expressions with ease revealing that he had spoken it since early childhood but he was also fluent in Aramaic, which was probably spoken at home, spoke some Latin and learned Hebrew. No doubt Paul would also have had religious training in the local synagogue in Tarsus.

Although we do not know at what age he went to Jerusalem to study under Gamaliel I the elder, it was mostly likely in his teens, perhaps even his late teens, though some feel by thirteen when a child became, 'a child of the law'. However, what parent would send a young child alone to a foreign country to study basic education? No, it was most likely when his secular education was complete that Paul went to study under a rabbi to pursue his zeal for the law; Hellenistic Jews were not ostracised by rabbis. In addition, even in Jerusalem Paul would have studied Greek rhetoric, Greek literature and Greek philosophy

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<sup>2</sup> *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, Conybeare & Howson, p32.

<sup>3</sup> Notice that Paul thus condemns his background as a Pharisee, the very thing that Jewish Root teachers are trying to foist upon the church since modern rabbinic teaching is but the old Pharisaism, as centred in the Babylonian Talmud. Rabbinic ideas feature very strongly in Jewish Root teaching, sometimes openly, sometimes hidden.

<sup>4</sup> Tholuck (*Essay on the early life of St. Paul*, p9) refers to Koppe who states that out of 88 quotations for the OT, 49 were cited from memory. Only occasionally does he use the Hebrew text.

in order to communicate with Diaspora Jews.<sup>5</sup> Simeon, the son of Gamaliel had many pupils who studied the wisdom of the Greeks.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, we know that Paul had acquired training as a tentmaker at some point, and this may well have been in Tarsus after his basic education; indeed he may have learned this from his father. It was unlikely to be in Jerusalem when he was studying the law, though some writers believe this. There was certainly a guild of textile workers in Tarsus; indeed the name for the Roman province derived from *cilicium* which was a type of cloth woven from black goat hair used in tent making. Tarsus was famous for its black tents and so those writers who suggest that Paul learned this trade in Jerusalem are off the mark. This means that Paul's stay in Tarsus was almost certainly into his late teens or beyond. However, he was still a 'young man' when he witnessed Stephen's death in Jerusalem, a term which covers 24-40 years old. It has been suggested that Luke intends Paul to be about 30 at this point in 33 AD (most Jewish men were married by this time and the term applies to an unmarried man).<sup>7</sup> His training as a Pharisee was complete by this age.

Paul's name, the name by which he calls himself in his letters, is not Greek but Roman. Since it is the name he himself chose, we have not right whatsoever to say that his proper name and title is 'Rabbi Sha'ul of Tarsus' (as per Jacob Prasch). Paul may have been originally named Saul by his father, but he preferred the name Paul, which was probably what he was called as a child in Tarsus by Gentile friends. Furthermore, he would have hated being called a rabbi, according to the command of Jesus about religious titles (Matt 23:8). We should honour his wishes and not re-write his own words according to our deceitful preferences.

Paul's family (that we know of) also have Gentile names. Junia and Lucius are Roman names while Andronicus, Herodion Jason, and Sosipater are Greek (Rm 16:7, 11, 21) ['Countrymen' can also mean 'kinsmen']. There was clearly a strong Roman connection in the family tied to the Roman citizenship. He had a sister and nephew but we do not know their names (Acts 23:16).

### **Paul's method and influences**

That there are Hebraisms and use of Palestinian midrashic methods in Paul's writings is without doubt. Indeed, Paul's training as a Pharisee was vital in order for him to be so well equipped to expound the doctrinal themes of the OT and to be so familiar with the texts.

We do not need to amplify this here since Jewish Root teachers emphasise this point. My purpose is to concentrate on Paul's Hellenistic background, a neglected subject. The reason why God chose Paul to be the chief defender and articulator of Biblical doctrine was that he was well versed in Jewish and Greek training and could communicate it in Greek thought to be universally applicable. Jewish Root teachers deny the latter.

#### *Greek philosophy*

Paul knew Greek philosophy well enough to challenge philosophers in Greece (1 Cor 1:20).

#### *Greek poets*

Paul was very familiar with Greek poetry because he cites Menander (*Thais*, 218 in 1 Cor 15:33), Epimenides (*de Oraculis*, in Titus 1:12), and Aratus (*Phaenomena* 5 or Cleanthes in Acts 17:28) and also alludes to Pindar (Acts 17:26).

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<sup>5</sup> RL Reymond, *Paul: Missionary Theologian*, p48.

<sup>6</sup> *Babylonian Talmud*, Sotah 49b.

<sup>7</sup> See RL Reymond, *Paul: Missionary Theologian*, p46.

### *Greek culture*

Paul repeatedly mentions Greek cultural events to illustrate important truths. At various times he alludes to the Greek games (Olympic Games) to highlight aspects of character he wishes to emphasise.

### *Greek hoplite soldier*

The description of the Christian in spiritual armour is a description of a typical hoplite infantry soldier; it is not a description of an ancient Jewish soldier as foolishly claimed by Jacob Prasch. The Romans copied much of the type of armour used by Greek soldiers and incorporated both their armour and their tactics into their armies; thus the Greek phalanx became the Roman *testudo*. At the time of writing this Paul was actually chained to a Roman soldier under house arrest. He simply looked up and described what he was familiar with.

## **Other Greek terms, idioms and illustrations**

### *Judgment seat*

This is the old Greek word *bema*; the official seat of a judge used for the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10). Herod built a *bema* resembling the Greek style throne at Caesarea, from which he viewed the games and made speeches to the people. This is not a Jewish concept.

### *The body of death*

‘Who will deliver me from this body of death?’ (Rm 7:24)

This is a reference to the Roman games (themselves being a copy of the Greek games but distorted with barbarism). A gladiator who had executed or killed an opponent (who may have been his friend) had to drag the body behind him around the coliseum to show the audience that the fighter was indeed dead. It was a grisly spectacle and the gladiator must have yearned to reach the exit gate and put the body down.

### *Greek athletic races*

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain *it*. And everyone who competes *for the prize* is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a perishable crown, but we *for an* imperishable *crown*. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as *one who* beats the air. 1 Cor 9:24-26

Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. Heb 12:1

And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. ... I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 2 Tim 2:5, 4:7

These all refer to Greek games and particularly athletic sprints and boxing.

### *Bodily discipline*

But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. (1 Cor 9:27)

This is another reference to the Greek games and the need of bodily discipline amongst athletes. There are multiple Greek references here.

‘But I beat (lit.) my body’ – has references to Aristophanes, Aristotle and Plutarch. It means a blow in the face, to beat black and blue the part of the face under the eyes. It is a reference to Greek boxers who used boxing gloves made of ox-hide bands, which gave telling blows. Paul was not willing for his body to be his master.

‘And bring it into bondage’ – uses a late compound verb from use in Diodorus Siculus, Epictetus and Greek papyri. It is the metaphor of the victor leading the vanquished as captive and slave.

‘Disqualified’ - Paul means rejected for the prize of the games, not for the entrance to the race. He will fail to win if he breaks the rules of the game.

### *Musical instruments*

Even things without life, whether flute or harp, when they make a sound, unless they make a distinction in the sounds, how will it be known what is piped or played? For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself for battle? 1 Cor 14:7-8

These are Greek not Jewish instruments. *Aulos* is a pipe (not flute) often used in Greek orgies; a common form was the double *aulos* with two pipes coming from the mouthpiece. [There was also the *syrinx*, a smaller instrument like a panpipe, often used by shepherds.] ‘Trumpet’ was *salpigx*, a long metal wind instrument with a mouthpiece, which was used in war or to herald public announcements. The harp was the *kithara*, a sort of stringed instrument. Greek philosophers associated it with gaiety, harmony and artistic sensitivity. It was supposed, in legend, to have been invented by Hermes but it became the attribute of Apollo. Athena invented the *aulos* but threw it away because it distorted her face. A satyr picked it up and invented a form of music. These are all Greek myths.

### *The Greek gymnasium*

But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Heb 5:14

Paul alludes to the gymnasium several times but here he actually uses the word. ‘Exercise’ is *gumnazo*, whence our English word ‘gymnasium’. Its original meaning was ‘to exercise naked’ which was how Greek athletes practised and performed, and thus were abhorrent to Jewish sensibilities. [I take Hebrews to have been written by Paul, just as most evangelical theologians in history have accepted.]

### *Toward the goal or mark (Phil 3:14)*

Another allusion to an athletic race. ‘Unto the prize’ – refers to the umpire who awards the prize in the games.

### *The church - ekklesia*

A vital and crucial NT term. God did not choose to use a Hebrew term for the church but chose a Greek political word which was originally used for the calling out citizens to meet for a political purpose.

### *Bishop*

A Greek word (*episkope*) for an elder meaning, an ‘overseer’; used three times in the pastoral letters.

### *Deacon*

This Greek word (*diakonos*) derives from another which means ‘to run errands’ and is used for the servants of the local church who tend to its practical needs, particularly in caring for the poor.

### *Slave*

*Doulos* was a slave or bondservant who gives himself up to another’s will. It is a word repeatedly used of Christ and the apostles. Though there are references to slavery in the OT, the concept of service as a bondservant in the NT is Greek.

*Steward*

While English translations of the Hebrew OT mention the word ‘steward’ there is no full understanding of this role in the text itself. The Hebrew word is usually ‘house’ (*bayith*) meaning anyone belonging to that house. The Greek text has *epitropos*, meaning someone who has care over others, a curator, guardian or pedagogue; or *oikonomos*, meaning the manager of household, steward, overseer, superintendent. The Greek cultural background has much more precision, breadth and meaning.

*Eph 3:20*

**Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.**

This is an example of Paul stretching Greek words in his exaltation about Christ, which also reveals Paul’s deep understanding of the flexibility of Greek language. ‘Exceedingly abundantly’ is a late and rare double compound adverb where Paul piles words on top of each other to express his point. Paul is struggling to find words to describe the ineffable greatness of Christ, so he makes up superlatives and the word ‘over and above’ is used twice in one sentence. This precision and emphasis is impossible in Hebrew.

*Cloud of witnesses (Heb 12:1)*

‘Cloud’ is a single cloud. A Greek metaphor referring to audience in an amphitheatre, the tiers of seats rising up like a vast cloud.

These selections are merely what I can conjure up from existing knowledge without going into deep research. If we had time we could multiply such references to Greek culture in the NT.

## **The direction of the NT**

If the Bible is a Jewish book, as repeatedly claimed by Jewish Root teachers, then it should predominantly be directed to Jews, but it is not. The Bible everywhere shows us that it is the word of God and not Jewish literature or any other human literature. The Bible is God’s word to man, and though he used a single race as a model to work out his plans for salvation under the Old Covenant, he repeatedly tells us that his intentions were for all men (Isa 42:6, 49:6, 60:3, 61:11, 66:18; Dan 7:14). The prophets were prophets to the nations (Jer 1:5, 10), while the word ‘Gentiles’ appears over 150 times in the OT and ‘nations’ appears nearly 600 times. Indeed, God chastises Israel for failing in her mission to deliver God’s word to the nations and succumbing to religious pride (Ezek 16:14-15, 20:13-14). Indeed, rabbis called the nations ‘dogs’, and prided themselves that salvation was only for Jews. It took some time for the apostles to be delivered of this presumption (Acts 10:45, 11:1, 18). The divine purpose in choosing Israel was to be the means of a witness to the world; the message was for the world.

When we come to the NT this universalism is even more apparent. The books of the NT are predominantly directed to Gentile nations not Jews. We can show this in a table.

Book	To Jews	To Gentiles
Matthew	Yes – but written in Greek.	Yes
Mark	Yes	Yes
Luke		Yes – written for a Gentile.
John		Yes – written in Ephesus to a predominantly Gentile congregation.
Acts		Yes – written for a Gentile.
Romans		Yes – written to a Gentile church.
1 & 2 Corinthians		Yes – written to a Gentile church.
Galatians		Yes – written to a Gentile church.
Ephesians		Yes – written to a Gentile church.
Philippians		Yes – written to a Gentile church.
Colossians		Yes – written to a Gentile church.
1 & 2 Thessalonians		Yes – written to a Gentile church.
1 & 2 Timothy		Yes – for the benefit of the Gentile churches Timothy pastored.
Titus		Yes – for the benefit of the Gentile churches Titus pastored.
Philemon		Yes – written for a Gentile from Colosse.
Hebrews	Yes – but probably based in Gentile nations.	
James		Yes – because it is probably the earliest letter written before the Synod of Jerusalem when most of the church was Jewish or Jewish proselytes.
1 & 2 Peter		Yes – written to persecuted Gentiles dispersed throughout Asia Minor.
1, 2, 3 John		Yes – written in Ephesus for John's disciples.
Jude		Yes – similar scope to 2 Peter.
Revelation	Yes	Yes

Even relatively uneducated, rural, Jewish, NT leaders, such as Peter and James from Galilee, wrote their letters in Koine Greek, either themselves or via a secretary.

The importance of the NT is shown in that it is the apostolic writing that Jesus promised to inspire from heaven, via the Spirit, as his last words to the church. This is the final teaching of Christ and is thus the means to interpret the whole Bible. The NT explains the OT, and it is written in Greek, mostly to Gentiles, and written in fine, precise language in order to clarify doctrine. It is not a Jewish book. Hebrew could not sustain such precision of thinking.

## Conclusion

The reason why God chose Greek language and culture for establishing precision in the formulation of Biblical doctrines by the apostles is not hard to see.

Greek civilisation had key ingredients to enable the transmission of doctrinal accuracy. Greece prided itself on a high perfection of the intellect and imagination, which were expressed in various artistic forms such as poetry, art, sculpture, literature and philosophy. This reflected a pursuit of purity of mind, love of beauty and mental expression in the world. Nothing like this is found in ancient Judaism (apart from the poetic sections of the

OT). Then there were the subtle disputations enjoyed by the Greeks requiring precision of speech based on a nuanced language with a wide vocabulary. Hebrew just cannot deal with the force of this. Greek has 28 different words for 'come' alone; it also has several for 'mind', something Hebrew does not deal with at all. To deal with mental issues Hebrew just has 'spirit' and 'soul' (life), hence the cause of some confusion when dealing with these subjects in the OT. Biblical development and clarity about issues of the mind arrives with the Greek NT.

That [Greek] language, which is the richest and most delicate that the world has seen, became the language of theology. ... It was not an accident that the NT was written in Greek, the language that can best express the highest thoughts and worthiest feelings of the intellect and heart. [*The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, Conybeare & Howson, p8.]

It is this precision of language that enables Greek to be a fine carrier of Christian doctrine, but the value of Greek education also has a place in the communication of theology. Paul was clearly educated to some degree in Greek culture and academic pursuits. Not many Jews would have had scrolls of Menander and Epimenides on their bookshelves. And this education was the best that the world had seen until this time. Training in rhetoric, philosophy, grammar, history and politics were excellent means of giving people a sound education to be utilised for higher purposes in the Gospel. Thus theologians after Paul sought this type of education to better themselves instead of the local pagan and debased education they would otherwise have had. Consequently they express themselves in Greek terms using Greek ideas and constructs. This is fine because it ensued that the best and most precise terms and arguments could be written for the discipling of Christians.

Jewish Root teachers condemn this in the utmost folly. Their claims are fallacious, their grasp of history poverty stricken. Their claim that Hebrew sources were better and were ignored is just a pipe dream. Just what were these sources? The apostles wrote in Greek and used the Septuagint version of the OT. Paul and Luke were trained in a Greek culture. John wrote from Ephesus and wrote for Gentiles in Greek; even Peter wrote in Greek and directed his exhortation to Christians dispersed outside Palestine. The sources we have of Jewish religious materials from this age are typified by the Babylonian Talmud. This is not only the most evil and blasphemous piece of writing on the planet, containing the most heinous slanders of Christ and the most foul support of wickedness, including paedophilia, but it is full of contradictions, rough speech and debased thinking. This work is much worse than Islamic texts. Is this really the preferred model for Christian doctrine?

Going back to my friend's conference advert,

- '*The Early Church Fathers imposed Greek thinking and philosophy on a Jewish book.*' No they did not. The book is not Jewish but the work of God to bring salvation to all men universally. The OT is mostly in Hebrew, but also in Aramaic, while the NT is all in Greek and filled with Greek idioms and thoughts. Furthermore the Judaism of the time of Jesus was not like the Judaism of the time of Moses and modern Judaism is like neither, being a pharisaic development after the destruction of the temple (which followed the Babylonian Talmud). Indeed, NT Judaism was thoroughly saturated with Greek language, idioms, and culture.
- '*Obscuring the Christian Church's subsequent understanding of how God's Word itself asks to be embraced, understood and interpreted.*' This is the very reverse of the truth. The Christian church was able to better understand God's revelation in dogmatic form as a result of the precision enabled by the Greek language and the Greek training of early theologians.
- '*This led to the erroneous and unbiblical idea that Biblical truth should be understood primarily intellectually.*' No it did not. The fathers themselves call for purity of heart, humility,

meditation, holiness, and the fruit of the Spirit. Intellectual clarity was required in order to defeat heresies (which sometimes depends upon a certain careful word or phrase) but the fathers were also pastors who did not want trained lawyers (unlike the Pharisees) but godly disciples.

- ‘*Various (contradictory and competing) systematic theologies and doctrinal systems.*’ The principle of systematic theology or dogmatism is common to all Protestant denominations; nearly all of which were originally Calvinistic. Jewish Root teachers want us to abandon intellectual clarity and systematic theology, but all Protestant churches realise the need for this. This puts Jewish Root teachers outside of Protestantism completely. In fact, most Protestant denominations are actually quite close theologically; disputes chiefly arise only on the doctrines of grace and baptism; there is much common ground.
- ‘*An approach which scripture itself knows nothing of and has never taught.*’ Yes it does. Paul’s letters are classic examples of deducing doctrine from OT and Gospel statements, evaluating them and then bringing them together in a systematised form. The book of Romans alone is a stunning piece of theological work, starting with the fall and sin, the guilt of all men, the input of grace, justification by faith, sanctification, election and predestination followed by practical application. This is a work of theology proper.
- ‘*The Hellenistic (Greek) approach of using logic and rational systematization to deduce concepts merely intellectually on an academic and theoretical level should never be used.*’ Well it was God in his sovereignty who ensured that it was used. What blasphemy to suggest that this was wrong. Just as God prepared the world for the Gospel with a universal language, seas free from piracy and safe roads, he also ensured the benefits of Greek education to train theologians in precision of thought and communication. Thank God that he did or we would all still be in error on the Trinity, or the natures of Christ, or the sovereignty of God in salvation and many other doctrines. It was Greek trained theologians who sorted errors on these doctrines out at great cost to themselves.

Shame on Jewish Root teachers!

The fact that many people are falling for this shameful heresy (we have not touched the surface on its wickedness here, see my other papers) reveals the dangers of Christians failing to study church history and having no knowledge of the facts.

It is my belief that the church at the end will reflect the church at the beginning. Thus we will see a time of great persecution led by a global empire which demands worship. Revelation demonstrates this clearly. But we will also see churches meeting in homes and secret places to avoid this, just as in the time of the apostles. However, the two chief means of apostasy which will suck in the majority of professing Christians will be the mystical Gnosticism and false signs and wonders of the Charismatic Movement on the one hand, coupled with the Judaising and legalism of the Jewish Root Movement on the other. Modern Judaising is a preparation for the end time global apostasy.

Be warned; the Jewish Root Movement is based on lies and is a gross heresy which seeks to elevate man and the flesh. Keep away from it.

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