

**Did You Know?**

***Aramaic was the Primary  
Language of Jesus & the Jews***

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Scholars generally agree that the language spoken by **Jesus** was Aramaic. A language he supposedly learned from early infancy in the Nazareth of Galilee, Aramaic is also the language in which Jesus is assumed to have preached to the crowds, composed the Lord's Prayer, admonished the religious leaders of the time, etc.

Aramaic is a language that belongs to the Northwest subbranch of the Semitic family (which also includes, among others, Hebrew, Phoenician, Ugaritic, Moabite, Ammonite, and Edomite<sup>1</sup>). It is assumed to have been spoken by the Aramean tribes as early as the second millennium BC, although the earliest known inscriptions date from the 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries BC<sup>2</sup>. The Arameans were good with trading. Their travels brought them as far as Assyria and Babylon, where their native language, Aramaic, slowly came to replace Akkadian, to the point where, by the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, it had become

the *lingua franca* of the Near East<sup>3</sup>. When Cyrus took over Babylon, Aramaic became the official language of the vast Persian Empire<sup>4</sup>. The Hebrews seem to have come in contact with this language relatively early. At any rate, by the time of their return from the Babylonian exile following Cyrus' edict (537) all the Hebrews spoke Aramaic. Hebrew remained only the language of the Jewish worship: the sacred text manuscripts read and interpreted in synagogues were in Hebrew, as were also the prayers or the more important religious texts memorized by any practicing Jew.

Aramaic thus became the main language of the Jews, whereas, with few exceptions, Hebrew was no longer understood by anyone except for the teachers of the Law. There are many pieces of evidence to support this. For example, it is worth noting that some of the later texts attached to the Old Testament canon, as well as what is now called the intertestamental literature, including some fragments of the Dead Sea scrolls, were written in Aramaic .

Scholars generally understand this reference to ‘the Hebrew language’ as a reference to the Aramaic language that, at that time, had been spoken by the Jews for at least 5 centuries.

## Examples of Aramaic in the Greek NT:

- *Rabbouni* – nickname given to Jesus; the equivalent of the Hebrew *Rabi* (Mk 10:51; Jn 20:16);
- *Abba* – Christ’s address to God the Father in the Gethsemane garden prayer (“Abba, Father, all things are possible unto you; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what you will”- Mk 14:36); the Spirit whereby, praying, the Christian cries: *Abba !* - Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6;
- *Talitha koumi* – “Little girl, I say unto you, arise,” from the episode of the resurrection of the daughter of Jairus (Mk 5:41);
- *Ephphatha* – “Open!” – uttered upon the healing of the man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech (Mk 7:34);
- *Eloi Eloi lema sabachthani?* – “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mk 15:34, quote from Ps 22:2).

**Examples of Aramaic in the Greek NT (ctd):**

Then the nicknames of the Apostles:

- *Boanerges* – “the sons of thunder” – about the sons of Zebedee (Mk 3:17);
- *Cephas* – the Aramaic name of the Apostle Peter - Jn 1:42; 1 Cor 1:12; 3: 22; 9:5; 15:5; Gal 1:18; 2:9, 11, 14..

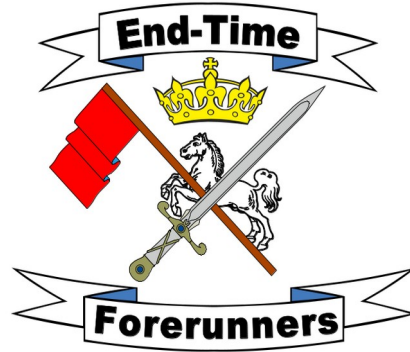
But also toponymical expression:

- *Gabbatha* – “the paved place” – where Pontius Pilate sat down at the trial of Jesus (καὶ ἐκάθισεν ἐπὶ βήματος εἰς τόπον λεγόμενον λιθόστρωτον, Ἑβραϊστὶ δὲ Γαββαθα. - Jn 19:13);

- *Golgotha* – “the place of the skull” – where Jesus was crucified (Καὶ ἐλθόντες εἰς τόπον λεγόμενον Γολγοθᾶ, ὃ ἐστὶν Κρανίου Τόπος λεγόμενος - Mt 27:33; Mk 15:22; Jn 19:17);

- *Hacheldamach* – “the field of blood” – where Judas Iscariot hanged himself (τὸ χωρίον ἐκεῖνο τῇ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ αὐτῶν Ἀκελδαμάχ, τοῦτ’ ἐστὶν χωρίον αἵματος. – Acts 1:19).





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