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Professor David Flusser Interviewed By Dr. Roy Blizzard

According to Flusser, what language (s) did Jesus speak?

Professor Flusser was asked by Dr. Roy Blizzard, what language did Jesus speak? Professor answered, that it is very improbable- we don't speak about his Omniscience-that he has spoken Greek. He said, that even today, some scholars who think that he has spoken Greek. That is very improbable. He knew both languages of the land, namely , both Aramaic and Hebrew, but when he taught, clearly he taught only in Hebrew. For instance [term] "Kingdom of Heaven" doesn't exist in Aramaic. All the parables in the rabbinic literature are in Hebrew and when you have some words in Aramaic in the New Testament, they are mostly in Mark. I have my personal doubts if this was not done by Mark himself, who was a Jew of the Dispersion and wanted to make a kind of "couleur locale" and put there the Aramaic and even the Aramaic is always translated. Professor Flusser said, that his experience is that it is impossible to translate some of the words of Jesus into Aramaic.

What difference does he suggest it makes?

According to Professor Flusser, the mistake about the Aramaic back ground of the New Testament arose in the sixteenth century when for the first time the Syriac translation on the New Testament was brought to Antwerp, and they decided -even today there are such men- that was the original language of Jesus. Only later another scholar, four hundred years ago in Leiden in the Netherlands, discovered that the Syriac is not identical with the Aramaic of Eretz Israel or Palestine.

When we study not only the rabbinic literature, even the Dead Sea Scrolls, we see that from the time of the Maccabees the language of the Jews was Hebrew. Also the discovery of the so called Ecclesiasticus (Ben Sira) one of the apocryphal books: it was written in Hebrew. So we see that even if Jesus said something in his time in Aramaic when he taught, it was evidently at the same moment translated into Hebrew, because from this time we have, with the exception of one man who came from Babylon, as far as I see, really no sayings, and no teaching in Aramaic. Professor Flusser noted that only later Aramaic became the [more] important language. It is also interesting to see that Delitzsch, who translated so well the New Testament into Hebrew with the help of a Jewish scholar, that he thought that the language [of Jesus] was Hebrew.

So I know that it is far more agreeable to translate Jesus' words in Aramaic, [in the eyes of modern scholars,] than to accept the simple fact that that Jesus has spoken Hebrew and that his teaching was in Hebrew. Professor Flusser indicated that he doesn't mean that when Jesus has gone to buy fish, that he hasn't spoken also Aramaic. All the Jewish prayers of his time, with the exception [the Kaddish], all are in Hebrew, and these are not even Aramaic words as in Talmud.

There are parts in Aramaic in the Old Testament . All these parts are from the time before the Maccabean Revolt and they chose, because the Aramaic was the natural language of the Persian Empire and later the Hebrew language was resuscitated, and only later, some centuries after Jesus, the Aramaic became prevalent, which is probably the consequence of the cultural crisis after the destruction of the temple.

What does Flusser propose is the background to the phrase “the poor in Spirit”?

Professor Flusser warns that readers should not use the New Testament in the New English Bible, because these men did not know the original language [Hebrew]. They translated the Greek without knowing what is behind it. These were English classical scholars, and I don't know how they translated

“the poor in the spirit,” but I am completely sure that they translated it wrongly, because they didn’t thought that this is a verbal translation of a Hebrew saying. What would you do if you would discover once the KJV, The authorized version, and you drew consequences [conclusions] from the authorized version about the English of the time of James 1, and you would interpret the KJV according to the writings of Shakespeare? Flusser said, he wants to warn the readers [not] to read some of the new translations of the Bible, for instance, The New Testament in the New English, where they [the translators] started from a knowledge of Greek and they didn’t understand the Hebrew background and so a strange mixture between a modern preacher and an ancient pagan Greek came into existence.

Professor Flusser indicated that when you see in the beginning of the beatitude, “How blest are those who know their need of God.”[NEB]. What [does] it mean? What is written here is : “ poor who have the Holy Spirit, who have a contrite heart, and ask God.” What [does it mean to have the need of God?” Where did “the Spirit” disappear? Flusser said, he thinks it is a holy forgery we read here.

What does it mean?

Professor said that those that who want to make a theology from the Greek, “poor in Spirit” are wrong. He said, you cannot say they became poor by the spirit, and so on or what you learn the Greek wording. You have to know that it was verbally [literally] translated, then when you know from the Dead Sea Scrolls what this “poor in spirit” in the Scrolls means, then you can find that the “poor in spirit” means not the proletariat, but that it means those who are poor and have the Holy Spirit.

He also said, in Isaiah chapter 60, he had to see what it means, and he understood that it means “the poor who have the gift of the Holy Spirit.” With the help of the Dead Sea Scrolls, there is no contradiction between Luke, who speaks only about the poor, and the “poor in spirit,” which means “the poor who have the Holy Spirit.” Then only later, he began to think about the Greek form, what it means that it is in Greek, “poor to spirit.”

What is the most surprising thing you heard from Flusser's interview?

The most surprising thing I heard from Flusser's interview is that – Note the saying that you have to pray in Hebrew because the angels don't understand Aramaic.