

## David Flusser Interview

Discuss the following questions: According to Flusser, what language(s) did Jesus speak? What difference does he suggest it makes? What does Flusser propose is the background to the phrase "the poor in Spirit"? What does it mean? What was the most surprising thing you heard from Flusser's interview?

According to Flusser, Jesus being a Jew in the 1<sup>st</sup> century spoke both languages of the land which were Aramaic and Hebrew but used Hebrew for his teaching. Another theory about the Aramaic background of the New Testament arose in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Flusser disagrees with it and gives an example of the term "Kingdom of Heaven" that doesn't exist in Aramaic and points our attention to the fact that all the parables in Jewish literature are written in Hebrew. Flusser states that from the time of Maccabees the language of the Jews was Hebrew, and even if Jesus used Aramaic, it was immediately translated into Hebrew. Flusser also explains that Jesus couldn't speak Greek, and the whole Greek theory is man-made.

In the beginning of the interview Flusser talks about the importance of Jesus' message that we must cherish and comprehend in the way it was meant. Jesus is the center of this message. When reading the Gospels, we instinctively hear his voice but to really grasp the message we need to know its' historical and linguistic background, thus, studying Gospels' Jewish background helps to put the pieces together and make the meaning of Jesus's words more authentic. Flusser brings out the importance of the linguistic analysis that involves not just the knowledge of Hebrew but the Hebrew that was spoken in the times of Jesus.

Flusser gives an example that demonstrates how the original meaning of the phrase can be altered by translation. To embrace the full meaning of "poor in spirit" Flusser compares two

variants of Greek and Hebrew. In Greek this wording uses an adjective and the dative case of the noun and will be understood as “poor to spirit”. According to Flusser this is an example of a word-by-word translation that doesn’t express the full meaning of the phrase. Hebrew variant gives a different understanding of the phrase as “the poor who have the gift of the Holy Spirit”. There is a huge difference and only Hebrew uncovers the original message of Jesus. It’s about people who are poor but have the blessing of the Holy Spirit.

The most surprising thing that Flusser said was his comment about how dangerous it is for us to use the most popular Bible versions such as the New English Bible, since they are translated without taking into consideration the Jewish background of the text. According to Flusser the straight word-by-word translation from Greek without comprehensive knowledge of Hebrew as the original language doesn’t express the full meaning of Jesus’ words. Flusser calls the result of this literal translation “a mixture of a modern preacher and a pagan Greek language”. He states that modern Bible translations represent the commentaries of the original text made by people who have no idea about the original message and the historical background. For Flusser, there is a serious danger in it, because the words of God are altered to the point where the original message disappears. It is understandable that knowing the Hebrew background of the Gospels’ texts helps to recover the actual words of Jesus but the majority of people who read Bible don’t even think about it. They make their own conclusions based on whatever translation they have in hands. It is almost scary because we all want to understand the words of God but whether the Bible that we read really gives us the access to the WISDOM is a huge question...