
Taking Responsibility

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Word. We have been entrusted with the preaching and teaching of God's Word and thereby with the oversight of his people, and thus the study of biblical languages should constitute a fundamental and significant part of our training. In general, the design of this grammar reflects both its scope (basic)

Figure 1: Pratico, Gary D., and Van Pelt, Miles V., in their September 2006 preface to *Basics of Biblical Hebrew*, Zondervan, 2007.

Knowledge of the Biblical Languages

There are, perhaps, two main dangers facing followers of the Messianic faith today. The first is the temptation to throw out all things “Christian” as utterly corrupt and tarnished; the second is the temptation to embrace all things “Jewish” as enlightened and pure.

But there is a third danger of which we need to be aware—the possibility and, indeed, the likelihood of an unconscious embracing of dubious values and attitudes which we have inherited from our Christian (or, for that matter, Jewish) background.

The inherited Christian attitude which concerns us here is the one concerning the biblical languages, the one which tells us that ordinary folk like us have no business learning anything of the original languages of the Bible, because this should be and must be left to the “experts”, the priests, ministers, and gatekeepers of the truth who tell us what the Bible says, because it is too dangerous to let the common folk acquire any of this knowledge for themselves, *even if their intellectual abilities would allow such a thing*.

Note that you will surely never find this printed in the creedal statements of any church. That is not the point. The unspoken value and attitude is nevertheless present.

The statement by Pratico and Van Pelt is quoted above to demonstrate this attitude within the wider Christian culture. There is nothing “wrong” in what they say, yet it does betray the kind of attitude I have just described, the attitude whereby the special elect are, by and large, the only ones expected to have any type of systematic knowledge of the biblical languages. Furthermore, and most importantly, we have *internalised* these values, so that we *ourselves* do not believe we can or should know anything of the languages of the Bible, and tellingly, *we have no desire* to acquire this knowledge.

But as Messianics, we know better than most that we cannot and should not rely on any elite to tell us what Scripture says, because this is the same as telling us *what to believe*. As Messianics, we know that key portions of Scripture have been systematically misinterpreted and *mistranslated*. Even the original text of Scripture has not been entirely immune from deliberate corruption by Church scribes who did not want the Scripture to say what it says.

In the face of this, it is obvious that we cannot blindly rely on “experts” to tell us what Scripture says, as if our translations are error free and entirely reliable. The idea that only an elite has access to the Bible in its original languages is one that comes directly from the Catholic Church, which has always jealously guarded its authority and power over the ignorant.

We must therefore take some responsibility for our own knowledge of what Scripture says, to the extent we are able. Very few of us are incapable of learning anything about the biblical languages, and many of us have the ability to acquire a considerable level of expertise. It is absolutely not the case that one needs to have some “special” ability or gift with languages: that is just a lie we tell ourselves because of our having been conditioned into internalising these harmful cultural values that result in our continued ignorance over time and over generations.

Be warned: the high priesthood will tell you, sooner or later, that, “a little knowledge is a dangerous thing.” You need to know that that is a simple lie. A little knowledge certainly *can* be a dangerous thing when used *foolishly*. If you know the limits of your knowledge, lean on the Spirit, and wisely avoid dogmatism and closing one’s mind on points about which you are not sure, then all will be well. The rest falls under the banner of minor mistakes, which we all make and which are part of life for all of us who do not wish to remain ignorant.