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## Preface

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JESUS and his disciples spoke and wrote Aramaic. His reported discourses and the earliest accounts of his deeds were written down and circulated in that language. In what way these primitive records were related to our Four Gospels is a question which hitherto has not received any satisfactory answer.

There is clear and complete evidence that the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John were composed in Aramaic on the basis of diverse written material widespread in Palestine, and that our Greek is the result of literal translation. There is very good reason to believe that Mk. was written in the year 40, Mt. a short time after. Each of these two Gospels was rendered into Greek very soon after its first appearance. The Gospel of Jn., composed in Palestine, presumably in Jerusalem, seems to have been soon carried away, to be translated into Greek many years later in a foreign land, perhaps at Ephesus.

Luke compiled his Gospel from Semitic sources only, collected by himself and rendered into Greek with remarkable faithfulness. The document comprising the first two chapters was Hebrew, the rest Aramaic. In his translation he made extensive use of the Greek of Mk. and Mt., wherever a faithful use of his sources permitted him to do so.

Both Lk. and Jn., in all probability, were put forth before the year 60.

The Aramaic Gospels, both the originals and the copies made from them, perished utterly, not even a fragment is known to have survived. For our knowledge of what the Evangelists themselves wrote we have *only* the Greek and the versions (Latin, Syriac, Coptic, etc.) known to have been made from it.

The Greek of our Gospels, with its thoroughly Semitic idiom, is the result not only of literal translation, but often of mistranslation, never extensive, but sometimes very disturbing. Thanks to the ancient word-for-word method of rendering, the cause of the trouble is almost always evident when an exact Semitic metaphrase of the Greek is made.

The purpose of this new Translation is to restore, in a multitude of passages, the sense which was originally intended but has been lost, all existing texts and versions containing the very same absurdities. Since no Aramaic text of the Gospels exists, the original readings must be, and generally can be, obtained through the Greek, by retroversion. The result obtained by means of this very carefully employed and tested process, the extent to which obscurities are removed and the obviously intended meaning takes the place of nonsense, can be seen by every reader who will compare the new readings with the old.

The English version which is here offered follows the Greek closely, diverging from it only where it seems probable, or certain, from recognition of the underlying Semitic, that the Greek rendering is wrong. Such *new readings* are indicated by an asterisk (\*) beside the verse-number. The comparatively few cases in which there seems to be good reason for emending the Greek text are similarly indicated by a dagger (†). The test of retroversion seems to show

that the text of Codex B stands very near indeed to that of the original translators.

The English Revised Version has been compared throughout, and its language freely used. Distinctly modern idioms and colloquialisms are studiously avoided. The modes of speech and the underlying conceptions of these records belong to ancient times and scenes, and the language may make a truer impression if some flavour of antiquity is preserved. Moreover, both the original Semitic and the Greek of translation represent the literary language of their time, not the vulgar speech.

Later additions to the Greek, retained in this Translation, are indicated by the use of square brackets in Mt. 13:14f., 23:10, Mk. 10:30, and Lk. 11:31f. In Mt. 14:12 and Mk. 9:13 the brackets indicate passages lost from the original text and restored from the parallels. In *one* case, namely Lk. 3:23—4:1, the brackets are employed with a different purpose, to show more clearly the manner in which the Evangelist himself inserted the Genealogy of Jesus in the Aramaic narrative which he was translating; an especially striking and instructive instance. With a similar purpose, the Genealogy given in Mt. is printed in italics, indicating the probability that it was found and incorporated by the author of the Gospel, not compiled by him. The 21st chapter of Jn. is a later addition to the Gospel, composed in Greek, evidently by the translator himself, who seems also to have been the author of the First Epistle of John. The italics in Lk. 1:1-4 and 3:1 are intended to indicate that these passages are of Luke's own composition.

Evidence supporting the conclusions presented in this Preface is furnished in the essay, "The Origin of the Gospels," and in the Critical Notes, appended to the first edition (1933) of this Translation.

