

The meaning of hebraistic terms as expressed in biblical Greek



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The term *Hebraisti*, a non-Greek expression written in Greek letters and found in both the Old and New Testament Scriptures, has been consistently shown to refer specifically to the Hebrew language. In contrast, the term *Suristi* is used to denote Aramaic. Other Greek terms – *dialektō*, *glōssa*, and *phone* – are used more generally to indicate 'language' or 'speech'. This study confirms that all words identified as *Hebraisti* in the biblical texts are indeed of Hebrew origin. Findings support the conclusion that Hebrew remained a living spoken language during the time of Jesus, contrary to the common assumption that Aramaic had entirely supplanted it.

Contribution: This study provides a clear linguistic delineation within biblical texts by demonstrating that the term *Hebraisti*, although a non-Greek word transcribed in Greek script, specifically denotes the Hebrew language, while the term *Suristi* refers to Aramaic. Such clarification refines our understanding of language references in both the Old and New Testament Scriptures, and aids in more precise textual and exegetical analysis.

Keywords: Hebraisti; Suristi; Dialektō; Glōssa; Phōnē; Hebrew language; Aramaic; biblical Greek; Old and New Testament; spoken Hebrew; non-Greek terms; biblical linguistics.

Introduction

The Greek New Testament contains a considerable number of non-Greek terms – foreign words or phrases – transcribed using Greek letters. These terms fall into three primary categories. In these instances, the Greek text acknowledges the Hebrew origin of the terms, although it does not always provide a semantic explanation.

Secondly, certain non-Greek words are presented with Greek meanings, but without any specification of the language of origin. Thirdly, there are instances where foreign terms are included without any clarification at all. Examples include *Sabaōth* ([Σαβαώθ], Rm 9:29; Js 5:4), *Sabbata* ([σάββατα], Ac 17:2) and *Pascha* [πάσχα] – an indeclinable noun that appears in passages such as Matthew 26:2, 17–19. The linguistic environment of the New Testament period was shaped by the coexistence of multiple Semitic languages, notably Hebrew and Aramaic. Abraham is called 'the Hebrew' ([*ʿAbrām hā-ʿĪbrī*], Gn 14:13), and his grandson Jacob, raised in a Hebrew-speaking family, spent 20 years with his Aramaic-speaking father-in-law Laban. Given this multilingual background, it is unsurprising that Hebrew and Aramaic share a significant amount of vocabulary and root structures. This linguistic overlap complicates the task of definitively identifying the original language of many Semitic terms transliterated into Greek in the New Testament, especially when the source language is not explicitly stated. Understanding these nuances is essential for biblical linguistics, textual criticism and theological interpretation, particularly as scholars attempt to reconstruct the socio-linguistic setting of Second Temple Judaism and the early Christian movement (Bar-Asher 2006; Fitzmyer 1979; Joosten 2012a). Many Christian scholars have long argued that by the time of Jesus' public ministry, Hebrew had become a liturgical or scholarly language, while Aramaic had supplanted it as the vernacular in Judea and Galilee. Consequently, non-Greek terms appearing in the Greek New Testament have often been assumed to be 'genuinely Aramaic', and some scholars assert that Aramaic was the primary spoken language of Jesus (Casey 1999; Fitzmyer 1979). This assumption has influenced numerous translations and lexicons. For example, one entry lists *Hebraisti* [Ἑβραῖστί] as: 'in Hebrew or Aramaic', and *Hebraidi dialekto* [τῆ Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ] as 'Hebrew language (i.e. Aramaic)' – reflecting the conflation of the two Semitic languages (Bauer et al. 2000; UBS Lexicon).

This interpretative tendency may be traced back to influential works such as Gustaf Dalman's *Die Worte Jesu* [The Words of Jesus (considered in the light of post-Biblical Jewish writings and the Aramaic language)] published in 1902, where he argued for the Aramaic background of Jesus'

sayings. Dalman's impact was substantial and persisted for decades, shaping the interpretive frameworks of many modern translators and scholars (Black 1967; Dalman 1902a). Surprisingly, this influence can be seen in translations like the New International Version (NIV), where *Hebraisti* in John 5:2 is rendered as 'in Aramaic':

Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic [*Hebraisti*] is called Bethesda ... (Jn 5:2, NIV)

However, the Greek term *Hebraisti* [Ἑβραῖστί] appears clearly in major manuscript traditions (Byzantine Text-Type [BYZ], Stemma Codicum Tradition [STE], Tischendorf Text-Type [TIS] and Westcott-Hort Text-Type [WHO]) not only in John 5:2, but also in John 19:13, 17; 20:16; Acts 21:40; 22:2; 26:14, and is consistently used to denote 'Hebrew', not 'Aramaic'. Even more striking is John 19:20, where the inscription above the cross described as written 'in Hebrew, Latin and Greek', yet some modern translations, including the NIV and ESV, render *Hebraisti* as 'Aramaic':

Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. (Jn 19:20, NIV)

Such translation choices suggest an interpretive tradition rather than linguistic precision, as there is growing scholarly evidence that Hebrew remained a living spoken language during the Second Temple period, alongside Aramaic (Joosten 2012; Morag 1959; Safrai 1987). Thus, *Hebraisti* in these contexts is more plausibly understood as a reference to genuine Hebrew rather than a general Semitic or Aramaic language. This study seeks to address two fundamental questions: (1) *Was it historically accurate that the Hebrew language had died out and been replaced by Aramaic during the time of Jesus' public ministry?* (2) *Does the term Hebraisti [Ἑβραῖστί] in the Greek New Testament refer to Aramaic, as some scholars and translators suggest?*

Research methods and design

This study employs a philological and historical-linguistic approach to address two above-stated main questions. The following methodological steps were taken:

- **Lexical analysis of Greek New Testament terms:** The study begins with the examination of the term Ἑβραῖστί [*hebraisti*] and the phrase τῆ Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ [*te hebraidi dialektō*] as found in verses such as John 5:2; 19:13, 17, 20; Acts 21:40; 22:2; 26:14. Reference was made to the *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (BDAG), which notes that *hebraisti* may mean 'in Hebrew or Aramaic' (Bauer et al. 2000), but the meaning must be tested by contextual and textual analysis.
- **Comparative analysis with Hebrew and Aramaic sources:** Non-Greek words found in the Greek New Testament were compared with parallel terms in the Hebrew Tanakh, Targum (Aramaic Tanakh) and the Septuagint (LXX) to identify roots and trace linguistic continuity or divergence. This approach draws from the methodology of Fitzmyer (1979), who explored the use of

Aramaic in post-biblical Jewish writings in his work *A Wandering Aramean*.

- **Examination of Josephus' historical writings:** Flavius Josephus provides critical historical insight by stating that he wrote in the 'Hebrew language' [Ἑβραϊκῆ φωνῆ, *Hebraike phone*] when addressing Jewish audiences (*Against Apion* 1.9).

The Greek New Testament contains a considerable number of non-Greek terms – foreign words or phrases – transcribed using Greek letters. These terms fall into three primary categories. Firstly, some are explicitly accompanied by the phrase *Hebraisti* [Ἑβραῖστί], which means 'in Hebrew'. Examples include *Bethzatha* in John 5:2, and *Gabbatha*, *Golgotha*, and *Gabbatha* again in John 19:13, 17, and 20. Secondly, the phrase *tē Hebraidi dialektō* [τῆ Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ], translated as 'in the Hebrew dialect', appears in Acts 21:40, 22:2, and 26:14. It is important to note that Hebrew was not merely a dialect, but the language of the covenant established with the Israelites, (*cf.* Septuagint [LXX] [Rahlfs & Hanhart eds. 2006a], Joshua 5:9), particularly in the Sinai tradition. The continued use of Hebrew served as a powerful reminder of the Israelites' identity as a covenant people, preserving a distinct religious and cultural heritage. This supports the thesis that Hebrew remained actively used during the 1st century CE (Feldman 1998). Furthermore, in *Jewish antiquities and against Apion, and The Jewish War*, Josephus (1926a, 1926b) makes a clear distinction between Greek and Hebrew, indicating that *Hebraisti* likely referred specifically to Hebrew proper rather than Aramaic. This linguistic distinction reinforces the understanding that Hebrew was still recognised as a living and significant language at the time (Suria & Ming 2025).

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was received from Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Kadesi on 12 June 2025 (No. 07/Dir-PS/STTK/P/VII/2025).

Results and discussion

The meaning of dialecto [διάλεκτος]

A key linguistic term in the Greek New Testament is *dialektos* [διάλεκτος], which is often translated as 'dialect', 'language' or occasionally 'accent'. In the Greek New Testament, *dialektos* appears six times: three times in the phrase τῆ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ ([*tē idia dialektō*] in their own language) – Acts 1:19; 2:6, 8 – and three times in the phrase τῆ Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ ([*tē Hebraidi dialektō*] in the Hebrew language) – Acts 21:40; 22:2; 26:14. In addition, the term occurs once in the Septuagint LXX (Rahlfs & Hanhart eds. 2006b), in Esther 9:26: τῆ διαλέκτῳ αὐτῶν [in their language] (Brown, Driver & Briggs 1906).

Despite some modern interpretations rendering *tē Hebraidi dialektō* as Aramaic, the Greek construction of the phrase indicates that *dialektos* means 'language', not merely 'dialect' in the narrow sense of regional variation (Fitzmyer 1979; Porter 1997). The term διάλεκτος in Koine Greek typically

refers to a distinct spoken language, as evidenced by its use during the Pentecost narrative in Acts 2. There, Jews from various regions hear the apostles ‘each in their own language’ ([τῆ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ] Ac 2:6, 8), a context that cannot be satisfied by interpreting *dialektos* merely as ‘accent’ or ‘regional pronunciation’. Rather, it denotes the different national or ethnic languages spoken by the dispersed Jewish communities (Keener 2012).

Moreover, in Acts 21:40 and 22:2, Paul speaks to the people ‘in the Hebrew language’ (τῆ Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ), which causes them to become silent, indicating that the language used was distinct and meaningful to the audience. This strongly implies that the people understood Paul to be using Hebrew, not Aramaic; as Aramaic was more widely used and would not have elicited such a specific reaction (Harris, Archer & Waltke 1980).

The Septuagint use in Esther 9:26 further supports this understanding:

‘διὰ τοῦτο ἐκάλεσαν τὰς ἡμέρας ταύτας Φρουραὶ ἐκ τοῦ λόγου τούτου κατὰ τὴν διαλέκτον αὐτῶν – [Therefore these days were called Phruvae because of this word, according to their language].’

Here, *dialektos* refers to the Jewish people’s native tongue, in which the festival name Purim is rendered. No Aramaic term *Phruvae* is known from either the Aramaic Targum or Josephus’s works, strengthening the argument that the Hebrew language is intended here (Feldman 1998; Josephus [1926b], *Antiquities* 11.295). Thus, both biblical and extra-biblical evidence support the conclusion that *dialektos* in these contexts should be understood as ‘language’ rather than ‘dialect’ in the modern linguistic sense. The assumption that *Hebraidi dialektō* must refer to Aramaic reflects later scholarly bias, rather than the linguistic precision of 1st century usage.

Further evidence from Josephus

The claim that *Hebraidi dialektō* [τῆ Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ] refers to Aramaic rather than Hebrew becomes untenable when examined against explicit examples from Josephus’ writings. A particularly decisive case is found in *Antiquities* 5.121, composed no later than the end of the 1st century CE. This text contains an explicit etymological statement identifying a Hebrew word:

... having put the government into the hands of Adonibezek [*Adōnizebekō*], which name denotes the Lord of Bezek [*Zebēkēnōn kurios*], for Adoni [*Adōni*], in the Hebrew language [*Ebraiōn dialektō*], signifies ‘Lord’ [*kurios*] ... (Josephus 1926b)

Here, Josephus offers a translation from Hebrew: *Adoni* [אֲדֹנָי, ‘ādōnāy], meaning ‘my lord’. This term is unquestionably Hebrew, not Aramaic. In Aramaic, the equivalent would be *mara* [ܡܪܐ], as used in the Peshitta (the Syriac-Aramaic New Testament) or *rab* [ܪܒ], as found in Targumic literature (Old Testament Aramaic) (see Bivin & Blizzard 2001:32–47; cf. Aune 1998; Grntz 1960). Moreover, Josephus consistently distinguishes Hebrew from Aramaic.

J.M. Grntz, writing in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, argues that Hebrew continued to be both the spoken and written language during the final days of the Second Temple period (Grntz, 1960: 32–47).

Literature, asserts it unequivocally. A another example reinforcing this is found in *Antiquities* 1.33:

... we celebrate a rest from our labours on that day and call it the Sabbath [*Sabbata*], which word denotes rest in the Hebrew tongue [*Ebraiōn dialektion*]. (Josephus 1926b)

Here, Josephus equates the word *Sabbata* [Σάββατα] with the Hebrew *shabbat* [שַׁבָּת], derived from the Hebrew verb *shavat* [שָׁבַת], meaning ‘to cease’ or ‘to rest’ (cf. Gn 2:2). This etymological connection is clearly rooted in Hebrew, not Aramaic, where the verb *nuchah* [נָח] or *nach* [נָח] would more commonly express the concept of rest. These textual examples from Josephus provide compelling philological evidence that the term *dialektos* in the New Testament and Josephus refers specifically to the Hebrew language when used in the phrase *hebraidi dialektō*. Attempts to retroject an Aramaic meaning into these phrases lack both textual and linguistic support.

Further linguistic clarification: The case of ‘Adam’ in Josephus

Another important textual example comes from *Antiquities* 1.34, where Josephus again explicitly connects a Hebrew word to its meaning:

... This man was called Adam, which in the Hebrew tongue [*glōttan to Ebraiōn*] signifies one that is red, because he was formed out of red earth ... (Josephus 1926a)

Josephus here connects the name *Adam* ([אָדָם, ‘ādām], Strong’s [1995] Hebrew #120, meaning ‘man’) to the Hebrew root *adom* ([אָדָם, ‘ādōm], Strong’s [1995] Hebrew #122), which means ‘red’. This connection relies entirely on Hebrew vocabulary. In contrast, the Aramaic word for ‘red’ is *sumqa* [ܣܘܡܩܐ], and the root *ADM* is not commonly found in Aramaic to mean ‘red’. Thus, the etymology provided by Josephus confirms the use of Hebrew, not Aramaic. This example is part of a broader pattern in Josephus’ writings. Other clear instances where he explains Hebrew words and names include *Antiquities* 1.33, 1.36, 1.117; 2.278; 3.32; 5.336; 20.264; and *Against Apion* 1.82; 2.27. In all of these cases, Josephus uses the phrase ‘Hebrew tongue’ [*glōtta Ebraiōn* or *dialektos Ebraiōn*] to refer specifically to the Hebrew language, never to Aramaic.

Critique of the pro-Aramaic interpretation

Proponents of the ‘Aramaic-only’ [*hebraidi dialektō*] hypothesis often claim that ‘Hebrew tongue’ [*glōtta Ebraiōn*] refers to Aramaic, assuming that Aramaic was the lingua franca of 1st century Judea. However, as shown precedingly, this interpretation fails to withstand philological scrutiny. Such an approach is based more on presumption than on rigorous analysis. There is often a complete absence of textual evidence or linguistic investigation into the actual usage of terms like *glōtta* [tongue and/or language] and *dialektos* [dialect and/or

language] in ancient sources. Rather than substantiating claims with primary texts, some scholars and lexicons have perpetuated this assumption uncritically:

Whenever Josephus mentions the Hebrew tongue [*glōtta Ebraiōn, Ebraiōn dialektōn*], he always means ‘Hebrew’ and no other language. (Grintz 1960:32; as cited in Bivin & Blizzard 2001:35)

It is therefore misleading to argue that ‘Hebrew tongue’ was merely a label for Aramaic. The evidence from Josephus consistently points to actual Hebrew – both lexically and grammatically – as the language referenced.

When engaging with the linguistic data presented in the Greek New Testament – particularly in the writings of the Apostle John – it is crucial to accept the internal claims of the text regarding specific vocabulary identified as Hebrew [*hebraisti*]. The authors of the New Testament designate certain non-Greek, Semitic words explicitly as Hebrew, and these assertions warrant careful analysis. There are six such terms cited in the Greek New Testament as being of Hebrew origin: *Bethesda* (Jn 5:2), *Gabbatha* (Jn 19:13), *Golgotha* (Jn 19:17), *Rabbouni* (Jn 20:16), *Abaddon* (Rv 9:11) and *Harmageddon* (Rv 16:16). Each of these will be examined individually to evaluate the credibility of their classification as Hebrew terms, as well as their implications for understanding the linguistic environment of 1st century Judea. These six Semitic words all appear to function as proper nouns, primarily designating places, with the notable exception of *Rabbouni*, which is a personal title or honorific. The analysis of these terms provides an important linguistic window into the New Testament era and offers evidence regarding the use of Hebrew as a spoken or at least liturgical language during the time of Jesus (Bauckham 1993).

Linguistic considerations prior to evaluation

Before evaluating the validity of the New Testament authors’ identification of certain terms as Hebrew [*Hebraisti*], it is essential first to understand the complexities involved in the transliteration process between languages – especially between languages as structurally distinct as Hebrew and Greek. Transliteration is not merely a phonetic transfer of letters; it involves adapting sounds that may not have direct equivalents in the target language. This often results in approximate renderings rather than precise phonological reproductions.

One key example is that Greek lacks certain consonantal sounds found in Hebrew and Aramaic. Notably, Greek does not have a letter corresponding to the Hebrew letter *het* [ח], typically transliterated as *kh* or *h*, nor does it possess the sound of the voiceless pharyngeal fricative, often represented by *h* in transliteration (Porter 2000). As a result, the Greek transcription of Semitic words may omit or substitute these sounds. For instance, the Greek letter *chi* (χ) can ambiguously represent multiple Hebrew sounds, including *kaph* [כ] and *het* [ח], depending on the context (Tov 2015:227).

A striking example of this transliteration challenge is found in the Hebrew word *Shiloakh* [שִׁלּוֹחַ, *shiloakh*], rendered in the Septuagint as *Siloam* [Σιλωάμ] in Isaiah 8:6. The Greek ending *-am*

appears to replace the Hebrew *-akh*, demonstrating a significant phonetic shift (Muraoka 1997; eds. Pietersma & Wright 2007). Conversely, in the case of *Bethlehem* [בֵּית לֶחֶם, *beit lehem*], the Greek transliteration *Bethleem* [Βηθλεεμ] fails to preserve the guttural sound of *het*, which is either softened or entirely omitted, resulting in a smoother phonetic rendering in Greek. These examples reveal that Greek transliteration conventions tend to simplify or suppress certain Semitic phonemes, particularly gutturals, which contributes to the variation in transliterated forms. Therefore, extreme caution and linguistic sensitivity are required when assessing claims about a word’s origin or classification based on its Greek form (Metzger 2001).

Case study: Bethesda [Βηθεσδά – *Bhesda*]

The Gospel of John states:

Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Hebrew [*Hebraisti*] is called Bethesda, having five porticoes. (Jn 5:2, YLT)

The term *Bethesda* is indeclinable in Greek and appears to be a compound word composed of two distinct Hebrew roots: *beit* [בֵּית] meaning ‘house’ or ‘place’, and *hesed* [חֶסֶד], meaning ‘mercy’ or ‘kindness’. This would yield the meaning ‘house of mercy’ or ‘place of grace’, which aligns theologically with the narrative context of a healing pool.

This construction is analogous to the name *Bethlehem* [בֵּית לֶחֶם, *beit lehem*], meaning ‘house of bread’. Both *hesed* and *lehem* are firmly attested Hebrew lexemes, occurring approximately 110 times and 242 times respectively in the Hebrew Bible, while *beit* appears over 1000 times (Koehler & Baumgartner 2001). The frequency and consistency of these terms in the Hebrew Bible confirm their status as classical Hebrew vocabulary.

In both cases, the Hebrew letter *het* [ח] is central, yet this phoneme is not accurately represented in the Greek transliteration. *Beit lehem* becomes *Bethleem* [Βηθλεεμ], while *beit hesed* appears as *Bethesda* [Βηθεσδά]. The *het* is effectively lost or softened in both transliterations. The addition of the terminal Greek alpha (α) may serve phonological accommodation, facilitating ease of pronunciation in Greek (Fitzmyer 1979:35).

Therefore, the loss of *het* and the vowelisation at the end should not be taken as evidence of an Aramaic origin, as often claimed by proponents of the Aramaic primacy hypothesis. Rather, these features reflect typical Greek transliteration practice when handling Semitic terms with guttural consonants and consonant clusters (Tov 2015:230–231). Accordingly, the Gospel of John’s claim that *Bethesda* is a Hebrew word [*Hebraisti*] is linguistically justifiable, consistent with Hebrew morphology and vocabulary, and supported by standard transliteration patterns.

Clarifying the Hebrew and Aramaic lexical distinction

While the Aramaic language also possesses the word *hesed* [ܚܫܕ], its semantic range differs notably from its Hebrew

counterpart. In biblical Hebrew, *hesed* consistently denotes mercy, kindness or covenantal grace – a concept deeply rooted in Israelite theology (cf. Ps 136; Ex 34:6). In contrast, in Aramaic, this term may also carry the negative connotation of ‘shame’, a semantic divergence that complicates claims of interchangeability (Fitzmyer 1979:41).

Moreover, in Aramaic usage, the preferred term for conveying goodness or kindness is often *ṭob* (ܛܘܒ) or *ḥubbā* [ܚܘܒܐ], such as *ḥubāyā* [ܚܘܒܝܐ] in Syriac, rather than *hesed* (Stevenson & Justnes 2017). This linguistic distinction helps explain why the term *hesed* appears frequently throughout the Hebrew Bible – from Genesis to Zechariah, totalling over 240 occurrences – indicating its firm rooting in Hebrew theological and liturgical vocabulary.

The presence of the Greek terminal alpha (*α*) in the transliterated form *Bethesda* [Βηθεσδά] should not be hastily interpreted as reflecting the Aramaic definite article, often associated with the suffixal aleph (א). Rather, it is likely a result of Greek phonological adaptation, similar to other borrowed Semitic terms like *Pascha* ([Πάσχα] Passover) and *Sabbata* ([Σάββατα] Sabbath), where the final vowel is added to accommodate Greek morphology and ease of pronunciation (Tov 2015:229–230).

If the Gospel text had explicitly provided an interpretive gloss – for instance, ‘Bethesda, meaning house of mercy’ – then the suggestion that the final alpha represents a definite article could gain some linguistic plausibility (Davies & Allison 1988). However, in the absence of such a gloss, the simpler explanation is that the alpha serves phonetic purposes in Greek transliteration rather than encoding a grammatical article from Aramaic.

A similar example can be found in the place name *Bethany* ([Βηθανία, *Bēthania*], Jn 11:18), which Thayer’s *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* traces to two Hebrew roots: *beit* ([בֵּית] house) and ‘*aniyyāh* ([אֲנִיָּה] affliction or poverty), derived from ‘*ani* [אֲנִי], a word found over 50 times in the Hebrew Bible with meanings such as poor, humble, afflicted or suffering (Thayer 1889:94). Thus, *Bethany* would mean ‘house of affliction’ or ‘house of the poor’, reinforcing the strong Hebrew origin of such toponyms (Young 1993).

Conclusion

The usage of the term *Hebraïsti* [Ἑβραϊστί] in the New Testament unequivocally indicates the Hebrew language, rather than Aramaic or any related Semitic variant. This designation is not merely a general label for ‘the Jewish language’, but a deliberate and consistent linguistic distinction maintained by the Johannine and Lucan authors. It signals the intentional use of the Hebrew tongue, particularly in the transliteration or translation of culturally and theologically significant terms within the Gospel narratives (e.g. [*Golgotha, Gabbatha, Rabbouni*]). In addition, the word *dialekto* [διὰλέκτω], often translated as ‘dialect’, is more accurately rendered in these contexts as ‘language’,

reflecting its broader semantic range in Koine Greek. It functions not to denote a substandard or derivative form of speech, but to specify the linguistic identity of a speech form, often tied to regional or ethnic identity. In passages such as Acts 21:40 and 22:2, where Paul speaks to the crowd ‘in the Hebrew dialect’, the context and response of the audience affirm that *dialekto* here denotes the Hebrew language, not Aramaic or a mere vernacular. A close examination of all non-Greek words introduced with the descriptor *Hebraïsti* within the New Testament reveals that these terms consistently correspond with known Hebrew roots, morphology and semantic fields. This alignment is demonstrable through textual parallels in the Hebrew Bible [*Tanakh*], supported by philological data from both ancient manuscripts and later lexicographical sources. While Hebrew and Aramaic share a common Semitic heritage and certain lexical overlaps, the precision of the New Testament authors in differentiating Hebrew from Aramaic (which is often termed *Syriac* in Hellenistic literature) should not be overlooked or conflated (Septuagint [LXX], Rahlfs-Hanhart Edition – *Septuagint* [Rahlfs & Hanhart eds. 2006c]).

In conclusion, both internal scriptural testimony and external linguistic evidence point to a deliberate preservation of Hebrew terms in the Gospel texts, introduced under the descriptor *Hebraïsti*. The prevailing assumption in some scholarly circles that these terms are Aramaic in disguise does not adequately account for the philological, grammatical and contextual data. Therefore, the terms *Golgotha, Gabbatha, Rabbouni*, and others labelled *Hebraïsti* are best understood as authentically Hebrew in origin and usage, reflecting the enduring significance of Hebrew as a sacred and liturgical language in the Second Temple period and early Christian tradition (Penner 2013).

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Authors’ contributions

D.M. conceived the research framework, provided theological and linguistic oversight, and led the analysis of Hebraisms in

the Septuagint and their theological implications in early Christian texts. M.D. conducted a comparative linguistic analysis between biblical Hebrew and Koine Greek, identifying idiomatic structures and syntactic parallels, and contributed to drafting the sections on linguistic methodology. P.S.P. focused on the historical and cultural background of Hellenistic Judaism and the socio-religious context influencing biblical Greek, and curated and annotated primary textual sources used in the study. K.S. handled data management, manuscript editing, source verification, coordinated the integration of Semitic influence in Greek lexicography and managed the formatting of bibliographic materials.

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Data availability

The authors declare that all data that support this research article and findings are available in the article and its references.

Disclaimer

This study is an academic work intended solely for educational and research purposes. All biblical, historical and linguistic interpretations are presented based on scholarly sources and critical analysis. The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and are the product of professional research. They do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency, or that of the publisher. The authors are responsible for this article's results, findings, and content. Every effort has been made to properly cite all referenced materials; however, any unintentional omissions or errors remain the responsibility of the authors. Readers are encouraged to consult primary sources and academic commentaries for further verification and study.

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