

All Spiritual Blessings

A study of the Aramaic background of
Ephesians 1




Why study Aramaic?

- It is the language of Jesus and the apostles
- The Bible is an Eastern book, written in an Eastern culture
- The culture is communicated by way of the language
- Understanding the Aramaic text gives us the “flavor” of the way people talked and thought

When I was in Bible school in the 70's, I took an introductory class on Aramaic, using materials that had been developed by Dr. George Lamsa. He was a pioneer in helping to make known the understanding of the Aramaic language to people in the United States. This class started a lifetime adventure for me of studying the language of Jesus and the apostles. What excited me about the class was how picturesque and beautifully simple the language was. Every word picture gave me a foundation to hang my understanding on, as one would hang a coat on a peg so that he could always find it again. (By the way, THAT was a word picture too!)

The Bible was written by Eastern people who lived in an Eastern culture. Understanding the Aramaic text of the New Testament will give us a basis of understanding the culture and from the “flavor” of the language, we as western people will have a glimpse of the eastern culture.

Marvin Wilson, in his book, *Our Father Abraham*, states: “The Bible contains many Hebraisms in which abstract thoughts or immaterial conceptions are conveyed through material or physical terminology.” (p.137)



Eastern Thought: Dynamic vs. Static Understanding

Eastern	Western
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pen – writes letters• Bible – holy men of God moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:21)• God – the strong, mighty one• Lord – master, the “Boss”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pen – an object with ink• Bible – collection of writings or books• God – the name of the Deity• Lord – owner, he to whom one belongs

Another pithy quote from Our Father Abraham describes the type of people who were the writers of the Bible as those who “use vocabulary which is highly colorful, dynamic, and action-centered.”

One way to describe the differences between eastern and western thought is to contrast dynamic and static understanding.

Dynamic thinking means that there is an underlying action in the thought.

Static thinking is that even a concept is stationary and can be described only with additional unrelated words.


Let’s look at some examples.



How to Understand Aramaic: Four Key Areas

- 1) Word roots and families
- 2) Idioms and figures of speech
- 3) Differences with Greek
- 4) Conceptual unity with Hebrew of the Old Testament

With this in mind as a background, there are four key areas that I want to discuss where the study of the Aramaic text contributes to understanding.



- Ephesians 1:3, 4:
 - Blessed be God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heaven in Christ,
 - Even as he chose us beforehand in him, from before the foundations of the world, that we should be holy [ones] and without blemish before him. And in love, he marked us out beforehand for himself

Read 1:3,4

Notice the almost rhythmic expression of the verse even in English. Repetition is a key ingredient of the Aramaic text. The example of repetition in verse 3 are the words *blessed be, has blessed us, blessings*. These three words all come from the same root.

In the next verse, we see another kind of repetition, but that accomplishes the same purpose, to remind us of WHEN the blessings were given. It is the repetition of the small word "before". He chose us BEFOREHAND, BEFORE... Beforehand is the small word **qedam**, which is repeated in 3 key places in the beginning of the chapter. The first 2 are in verse 3.

He chose us beforehand...He marked us out beforehand for himself

v. 11 he marked us out beforehand...according to the purpose of his will.

We see two key verbs because of these repetitions: BLESSED, Marked out In order to understand the dynamic thinking of these words, we need to see the "root picture" of action for these two verbs.



Word Roots and Families

- Every word is related to a basic verb root. Many times this verb is an action.
- The verb paints the “root picture” that gives the basis for all words in that family.

The verb blessed in its simplest meaning is “to bow down” or “to bend the knees”. In fact, the word knee also comes from this verb. We had to bow down and accept what the Lord Jesus had done for us in order to receive God’s blessings. We needed to become a son of God and receive salvation by humbling ourselves to God. Then he bestowed his blessing on us – filling us with his Holy Spirit. All spiritual blessings is literally: all blessings of the Spirit. This whole chapter is filled with blessings of what we have in Christ by way of the Holy Spirit.

Marked out – the picture is “to engrave” or “inscribe”, like a tattoo or an etching on stone. We still are finding words written in stone from the Near East, when most other ways of writing have long disintegrated. I had a friend who wanted to erase a tattoo and it was a very lengthy and painful process to get it to even fade. One use of this verb is in Romans 8:29: “he marked them out with the likeness of the image of his Son.” So now you can see why I said that all spiritual blessings came because of the gift of the Holy Spirit in us.

I could take any number of words or verbs in this chapter and show the same “root pictures” of action in the verbs. Here are a few additional ones:

v. 7: redemption: to rescue or deliver. We normally think of redeem meaning “to buy back”. This picture is when one is going over a ledge to fall to the bottom of a mountain precipice and just before we go over the ledge, we are rescued and snatched back to safety, being “delivered” or “rescued.” We are redeemed by his blood.

v. 14: honor, verb is “to be heavy” God gave us of his “weight” He is holy and he was spirit, so he gave of what he is.



2) Idioms and figures of speech

- An idiom is a peculiar grammatical construction that means more than its literal translation
- These are marked in this translation in outline type

These are not earth shattering differences, but the idioms of a language again, give the “flavor” of how the people thought. There are many idioms with the word “son of” for example:

Son of a rooftop means someone insane

Son of a place means a resident

Son of the upbringer is a foster brother

Sons of the church are clergy

Other common uses of words that are idioms are with “hand,” “face,” house,” “eye,” “head.” We have collected an extensive list which is included in the printed version of the translation. (Show)



Examples of idioms in Ephesians 1

- Adopted us
- By way of
- We have
- Everything
- Again
- Placed us as sons
- By the hand of
- There is to us
- All what
- From the beginning

Examples of idioms in Ephesians 1: (marked in outline type)

v. 5, He adopted us: placed us as sons

v. 6, by way of: by the hand of

v. 7, we have: there is to us

v. 10, everything: all what

v. 10, again: from the beginning, from the head. Again is literally from the head, and can be translated again, or from above. To be “born again” is to be born from above, or from the “top”, born of God.



Figures of speech

- A figure of speech is a “change of form” – schemata
- A figure is always used to add force to the truth presented, emphasis to the word or words and depth of meaning to the entire context.
- A figure of speech marks what is important in a verse or passage

All language is ruled by laws, but to convey special emphasis of a word or group of words, these general laws of language are purposefully departed from, and other laws of language are invoked, giving the single word or group of words a new form. The Greeks called these departures from normal language use, *schemata*, meaning “change of forms,” from which the term “figure of speech” originated.

E. W. Bullinger stated in the beginning note of his classic book *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*:

“...whenever and wherever it is possible, the words of Scripture are to be understood *literally*, but when a statement appears to be contrary to our experience, or to known fact, or revealed truth; or seems to be a variance with the general teaching of the Scriptures, then we may reasonably expect that some figure is employed. And as it is employed only to call our attention to some **specially designed emphasis**, we are at once bound to diligently examine the figure for the purpose of discovering and learning the truth that is thus emphasized.”

Read points 2 & 3



Five categories of Figures

- Repetition
- Illustration (simile, metaphor, parable)
- Grammar (parenthesis, ellipsis)
- Rhetorical (interjection, benediction)
- Meaning (metonymy, synecdoche)

There are over 220 different kinds of figures of speech that are catalogued by Greek and Roman writers and have carried into English. I believe that at least 1/3 of these have to do with western rhetoric and as such, do not help with the understanding of our eastern text.

Of the remaining amount, I have categorized them into five main categories:

The meaning category is by far the most varied and I think also the most interesting.



Antiptosis, or Exchange of Cases

- The first noun modifies the second in a genitive phrase.
- Used 6 times in Ephesians 1:6-14
 - Glory of his grace
 - Wealth of his grace
 - Mystery of his will
 - Purpose of his will
 - Esteem of his magnificence
 - Glory of his honor

Let's look at one example of a figure used in Eph 1 that is in the "grammar" category: Antiptosis.

I use the Greek name of the figure normally, because they are well known by these names. The definition of antiptosis is "exchange of one case for another." Simply, in a genitive phrase, the governing noun becomes the adjective and modifies the second noun.

In Ephesians 1:6-14, this figure is used 6x, which is very unusual! But it clears up phrases which are difficult to understand in this section. They are marked by a superscript "as" and what is emphasized is the NOUN.

"his glorious grace"

"his rich grace"

"his secret purpose"

"his intended will"

"his honorable or esteemed magnificence"

"his glorious honor"

From these verses, we understand that God blessed us with all spiritual blessings – By grace, because it was his will and secret purpose, and by those blessings of the

Spirit, we glorify and show his magnificence! It was all God's idea, the emphasis is all on HIM!



3) Difference with Greek text “To the praise of his glory”

- 1:6: that the glory of his grace would be glorified
- 1:12: for the esteem of his magnificence
- 1:14: for the glory of his honor

When there are differences with the Greek text, it is important to note why, because there is a great lesson in the different explanation.

Usually in the comparison of the two languages, there are matching words with some variation, but one can say this Aramaic word lines up with *epainos*, this one with *doxa*, etc. In this phrase of “to the praise of his glory”, the Greek is exactly the same in each verse, but the Aramaic has very specific words in a specific order. So this is a puzzle to know why they are different.

1:6: There is a beautiful picture of grace being poured out upon us. "The glory of his grace may be glorified" is another figure of speech, *polyptoton*, where there is the same root used in different forms, in this case, first the noun and then the verb. You could also say, "the magnitude of his grace may be magnified" or "greatness of his grace may be aggrandized". This Aramaic word for glory is the simple word and lines up most of the time with *doxa*. This confirms what we have seen before, that the emphasis of the first eight verses is all GRACE. That is what we glorify because he poured it out upon us in Christ!

The translation of "to the praise of his glory" in verse 12 is "for the esteem of his magnificence." Esteem is *hedra*, and can mean excellency. It is from an Aramaic root, "to be adorned". Magnificence is an intensified word for glory.

Verse 9 says "having made known to us the mystery of his will." The mystery was a secret hidden since the world began (Romans 16:25) that the Gentiles would be fellow heirs together with the Judeans and partakers of his promise (Ephesians 3:6) and that it would be Christ in you (Colossians 1:27). It was known in the Old Testament that the Gentiles would be blessed because of Abraham and Israel, but never that they would be equal! In the epistles, God reveals a whole new plan: one body, all equal, each having the full measure of the spirit. This was a wonderful secret, but now "according to the good pleasure which he purposed in himself," it is revealed!

We can now see what "esteem of his magnificence" is. It was God's will; He hid the secret (none of the angels even knew); He determined and purposed this according to the counsel of His will.

1:14: We are sealed with the promised holy spirit and this is the guarantee or down payment of our inheritance. All the power of that spirit is ours to manifest and use including all nine manifestations, some of which are: receiving revelation, gifts of healings, discerning of spirits, as well as the fruit of the spirit, which is love joy, peace, etc. But here is how it works: God is holy (Leviticus 20:26) and God is spirit (John 4:24). Then on the day of Pentecost he gave the gift which is holy and which is spirit. He gave what He is! So every time we use that gift and show it forth we show the value or honor of God.



4) Conceptual Unity with the Hebrew Old Testament

- Since Aramaic and Hebrew are “cognate” languages, there is a unity in the use of words from the Old to the New Testaments.
- Understanding of concepts can now be seen throughout the whole Bible

This last key area we could spend the entire teaching on.

Cognate means “sister language.” Aramaic and Hebrew have the same parent origins and were in use at the same time, sometimes one or the other being more prominent. Since the OT is written in Hebrew, if we know what the Aramaic word for a word in the New Testament is, then we can see its corresponding or cognate Hebrew word in the OT and we are able to study the concept from Genesis to Revelation.

We briefly saw this at the beginning of the teaching with the understanding of the word for “God.” El is the Hebrew word and Alaha is the Aramaic. Both have the underlying meaning of “strength” or “might.”

Another example is the word for “Christ.”



Christ is “Meshikha”

- The root verb in both Hebrew and Aramaic has a two-fold meaning
 - To anoint
 - To measure

Jesus Christ is the anointed one
He had the full measure of the Spirit

Christ is the Aramaic word Meshikha. The root verb in both Hebrew and Aramaic has a two-fold meaning: to anoint and to measure. Jesus or Yeshua, the anointed one, had the full measure of the Spirit according to Ephesians 4:7-13. That full measure was anointed or measured to us as well.

When God says that he blessed us with all spiritual blessings In Christ, it means he blessed us in that anointing of the full measure that Jesus Christ had. That is why he can say that it is ALL blessings of the Spirit.

We could go back to the Old Testament and study all the verses with anointing and anointed and now study this concept from Genesis to Revelation.



Conclusion

- All spiritual blessings are given to us IN CHRIST
- In him, in whom, in Christ, in the beloved one, used 10x

We discussed the four key areas where Aramaic study is very valuable: word roots and families, idioms and figures of speech, differences with the Greek text and conceptual unity with the Old Testament. To summarize this passage of Ephesians, all of the spiritual blessings are given to us in Christ. There is a repetition of the phrase “in him” with slight variations 10x.