

A Refutation of Glenn David Bauscher's “Proofs of Peshitta Primacy”

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Recently, while researching for personal learning, I googled “eastern aramaic peshitta,” and found, fourth among the results returned, a PDF entitled “Proofs of Peshitta Primacy,” by a man who calls himself Rev. Glenn David Bauscher. The 13-page paper sets out to prove that the Peshitta, the Aramaic text of the New Testament which some eastern churches use, is in fact the original text of the New Testament. The traditional view has been that the Greek New Testament is original, and that the Aramaic text is translated from it. And so this proposal by Mr. Bauscher sets out to prove that the scholarly consensus view is wrong.² Although I am willing to entertain the possibility that scholarship has reached a wrong view, it will require the use of conclusive evidence to demonstrate this. The aim of this paper is to carefully examine whether Mr. Bauscher's views do indeed indicate a problem in our current understanding of the history of the New Testament. I will show that his work quickly degenerates into a collection of illogical and false assertions. The reader should feel free to stop reading, if he so chooses, whenever it has become clear that the “Proofs of Peshitta Primacy,” and any other unsubstantiated claims by Mr. Bauscher, are not to be taken seriously.

1—Divine Name ELS's

The paper starts with “proof” #1: that “hundreds of thousands of Divine Name ELS's [are] found . . . throughout The Peshitta NT.” Bauscher then goes on to assume that the probability of finding a single ELS is one in one thousand, and that therefore the probability of these thousands of ELS's would be found in the Peshitta, were it not of divine origin, is one in 10^{1050} ³, which he then for dramatic effect spells out as a probability so low that it includes line after line of zeroes. He then informs us that these codes, which do not exist in the Greek NT, are “scientific evidence of the Divine inspiration of The Peshitta NT”).

This fact #1 would be impressive, were it not for a number of missing things. First, Bauscher fails to define the term “Divine Name ELS,” so that we are forced to take his word that whatever he is speaking of, it is certainly rare and impressive. What he is referring to is the practice of counting letters across arbitrarily selected chunks of the New Testament in hopes of finding a specific phrase hidden in the text. He assures us that the “Divine Name ELS” is found hundreds of thousands of times in the Peshitta, and yet he never substantiates this claim either. The only source he cites is the website dave.ultimasurf.com, which appears to no longer exist. In light of the way in which Mark Perakh⁴ has

- 1 Like anything else I make available on fontwords.com, this essay may be freely copied without the need to ask permission. I would however, be happy to hear what use others may make of it.
- 2 Please note that, because he sells both books and computer downloads of his own translation work from the Aramaic Peshitta, Glenn David Bauscher has a financial profit to make by convincing people that the Peshitta is the original New Testament word of God. Perhaps some trace of such a motive can be seen in his distortion of facts in order to support his ideas, a distortion which this paper will show permeates his thinking on the subject.
- 3 If the odds are 1/1000, as Bauscher claims, for even one ELS, it would logically follow that “hundreds of thousands” (at least 200,000) divine name ELS's would produce odds of one in $10^{600,000}$ or lower. The figure he arrives at, one in 10^{1050} , would indicate only 350 divine name ELS's in the Peshitta. No explanation is given for why he claims hundreds of thousands of ELS's but calculates their probability as though only 350 of them existed, nor is there a single explanation or example of an ELS given or referenced in his “proofs.”
- 4 See his book *Unintelligent Design* and articles which can be found online. The fact that Mr. Perakh is an atheist and a staunch opponent of scientific creationism does not detract from his logical reasoning concerning the question at hand—whether the conclusions reached by Bible code proponents serve as “scientific proof.” If anything, those of us who are

used mathematics to cast strong doubt on the validity of these “Bible Codes,” and the complete lack of corroborating data supplied by Bauscher, we must therefore discard his first claimed proof.

2—9000+ Data of Word Comparisons

His second proof lies in the claim that “9000+ data of Greek-Aramaic word-pair comparisons,” involving some sort of poorly explained word-ratio studies, support the conclusion that the NT Greek text must be derived from the Peshitta. This second proof fails to explain what the ratios prove, what the ratios are, and what the “9000+ data” is. Again he references the non-existent website mentioned above. Until such time as he can make a comprehensible statement about it, Bauscher's so-called proof #2 must also be rejected.

3—Josephus, *Antiquities*, Book XX, Chapter XI, 2

The third proof is somewhat better than the first two, if only in that it abandons the use of meaningless numbers filled with zeroes and unsupported assertions, thus leaving something of some substance to criticize. It begins with a quote from *Antiquities of the Jews* by the well-respected Jewish historian Josephus, who informs us that he could “not pronounce the Greek with sufficient exactness:”

I have also taken a great deal of pains to obtain the learning of the Greeks, and to understand the elements of the Greek language, although I have so accustomed myself to speak our own tongue, that *I cannot pronounce the Greek with sufficient exactness*. For our nation does not encourage those that learn the language of many nations. On this account, as there have been many who have done their endeavors, with great patience, to obtain the Greek learning, *there have hardly been two or three who have succeeded* therein, who were immediately rewarded for their pains. [Emphasis Bauscher's]⁵

This quote is indeed an accurate quotation from Josephus, but only demonstrates that Josephus found his Greek imperfectly pronounced, and the rest of the quote from Josephus only demonstrates that the Jews of Josephus time were not enthusiastic about the learning of foreign tongues. Following this paragraph, Bauscher begins to make conclusions which he implies are based on this evidence. First, Bauscher considers Josephus' writing proof that Jews could not speak Greek. Josephus, however, says no such thing, but only that he himself spoke with a Hebrew accent, that the Jews did not encourage those who learn multiple languages, and that “there have hardly been two or three” who managed “to obtain the Greek learning,” which is a different matter from saying that first-century Jews could not speak Greek.

What Bauscher is endeavoring to prove from Josephus is that the Jews of Jesus' time, using Aramaic as their primary tongue, could not have read or written the gospels in Greek.⁶ He says of scholars, “They completely ignore the idea that the gospel would be written in the language of the people who wrote it

Christians should be thankful for his work in stopping some of our own from using distorted facts which are an embarrassment to Christian scholarship.

5 This quote is taken from Whiston's translation of the works of Josephus.

6 In light of the miracle of Acts 4, in which God allowed the speech of the apostles, whatever language it was originally in, to be understood by a vast number of different peoples *in their own languages*, one would imagine that God could inspire the gospels in whatever language he might choose. But, as will be demonstrated by the biblical quotations, it would not necessarily be impossible, nor even improbable, for the apostles to write in Greek even without a miracle.

and the language of the immediate audience that would read it. . . . *When will scholars come to their senses?*” [emphasis original].

However, Bauscher's belief that the people of Palestine would have been only able to speak one language, though consistent with life in the United States, does not find substantiation in contemporary Israeli life (where trilingualism in Hebrew, Arabic, and English is common), nor in the Biblical account. Luke 23:38 informs us that above Christ's cross the accusation was written against him in three languages, “in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew,” which indicates that first-century Israel was home to speakers of all three languages. Surely such a situation would lead to the existence of a great many people capable of speaking more than one language. John 19:13 informs us that a place was called in Greek “Lithostrotos” but in Hebrew “Gabbatha,” indicating that local place names reflected the multi-lingual nature of Jesus' homeland.⁷ Examples of the New Testament's references to the multilingual nature of Israelite life in the New Testament environment include John 19:20, Acts 21:40 and 22:2, 26:14, and Revelation 9:11. It therefore seems that it is not the “scholars” who refuse to “come to their senses,” but Bauscher himself.

4—Variant Readings

Bauscher's next proposal is the greater number variants between Greek manuscripts than between Peshitto manuscripts are evidence for Peshitto primacy. He explains, further, that “many variants in the Greek can be explained as different translations of the same Aramaic word in The Peshitto version, where double meanings are possible” (2). Because he fails to give even a single example in support of this claim, I am unable to refute it.

His next claim is more easily dispatched. He claims that the Peshitto cannot be a translation because it does not exactly reflect any particular texttype among the Greek manuscripts. He also points to about 75 verses where the Peshitta does not match any extant Greek manuscripts as proof that it could not have come from them. But as initially attractive as this claim may seem when examined without critical thought, it fails to show itself logical. Using the same sort of logic, one could “prove” that the Greek text does not come from the Peshitta, because the difference in those 75 verses show that the Greek text could not have come from it, and because not a single Greek texttype matches the text found in the Peshitta. Or, using an example that even more clearly shows the illogic of Bauscher's claim, we could point to the fact that the World English Bible (at eBible.org) does not exactly match any single texttype in Greek tradition⁸, and that some of its verses do not match any Greek version⁹, and then consider that to be proof that the World English Bible is not derived from the Greek, but is in fact the original New Testament.

Bauscher closes this paragraph by stated of the Greek readings, “All of them can be shown to have derived from the Peshitta; The Peshitta cannot have derived from any one of these, in the majority of cases.” If examples were given, I would be willing to try my hand at disproving them, but I will not

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- 7 And lest Bauscher or others propose that the Greek translator of the Aramaic book of John was simply giving the equivalent Greek word for the Aramaic or Hebrew “Gabbatha,” the reader should note that “Gabbatha” means “knoll” in Hebrew, while “Lithostrotos” means “stone-strewed.” Thus, they were co-existing but different place names.
 - 8 Careful comparison of the Word English Bible to the Greek MSS shows that it rather indiscriminately adopts readings from the Textus Receptus, the Byzantine Textform, and the Alexandrian texttype.
 - 9 An example of this is the in Matthew 4:6, where the World English Bible has “put his angels in charge of you,” where no Greek text has this reading. The Greek texts, on the other hand, have “command his angels concerning you.” Therefore a difference between a version and the Greek text does not mean that the text does not come from the Greek; on the contrary, it is more reasonable to suppose that both the World English Bible and the Peshitta text occasionally mistranslate the Greek text.

even attempt to disprove such an unsubstantiated blanket proclamation.

5—Accuracy and Consistency

Bauscher's fifth proof of Aramaic primacy is nothing more than an attempt to resurrect his fourth proof. His fifth contention is that because there exists a wide variety in Greek manuscripts, but almost complete agreement among Aramaic texts. Again, this contention shows itself to be a fallacy. The fact that the Peshitta texts are less diverse than the Greek proves nothing. The Latin text, which is known to have been produced from the Greek, also contains far fewer variants, but this is not because the Latin is superior or original, but because they are all copied from the work of a single translator who created a single text. The same holds for the Peshitta.¹⁰

Bauscher then shows no end of numbers promoting the fact that the Peshitta contains less variation than the Greek texts. But no matter how many numbers he produces his point remains completely unconvincing, in light of the above-mentioned principle that it is perfectly possible, even expected, for a translation to show less variation among its manuscripts than the original-language texts. “Facts are pesty things . . . for those who have an interest in promoting an agenda,” says Bauscher, in another fountain of rhetoric condemning the state seminaries and Bible colleges. He is correct about the nature of facts. They have thus far proven quite *pesky* for Bauscher's agenda.

6—Transliterations of Aramaic words and phrases

The New Testament—and no one will deny this—contains transliterations of certain Aramaic phrases. An example of this is Mark 5:41, “And he took the girl by the hand, and said to her, Talitha Koumi, which is translated, Girl, I say to you, get up.” Bauscher claims that “If Greek were the original language of the NT writers, this transliteration would not occur.”

This claim, like all five of the preceding claims, is empty. The use of phrases from a language in a book does not prove that it was written in any of those languages. I recently read, to show a counterexample, Primo Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz*, a book which, though in English, frequently contains quotes in *German, Italian, and French*. This would prove, if we borrow Bauscher's logic, the contradictory notions that the original book was in German, and that the original book was in Italian, and that the original book was in French. Clearly, the use of quotes from a foreign language does not prove that a book was written in that language. All that it proves is that the writer wishes to show the reader phrases in the languages used in the accounts being spoken of. In the case of Levi, the camps were filled with speakers of German, Italian, Polish etc. Examples could easily be multiplied of other books which borrow foreign phrases from languages that were not the original written language of the books. Therefore, the presence of Aramaic phrases only shows that the writer wanted to preserve Jesus' exact Aramaic statements, and not that the writer was writing in Aramaic.

7—Translations with Transliterations

The seventh proof is that the transliterated Aramaic phrases are sometimes accompanied with translations, “practical declarations by the Greek copyist and original translator that 'I am translating Aramaic into Greek.’” Furthermore, he states that the Greek word *ermayneuo* is used in these places. Now, *ermayneuo*, according to Bauscher, means “I translate”—direct proof that the producer of the Greek text was translating from an Aramaic text.

¹⁰ Indeed, a comparison of King James Bibles would show even less variation than Peshitta MSS., but again lack of variation does not prove origin, but merely indicates accurate copying from a single translated text.

However, this claim also must be thought about carefully. First, even if Bauscher were right in the *facts* he references, this would not prove his *conclusions*. For if the writers of the Greek New Testament had said, “I translate” after giving an Aramaic phrase, this would show nothing more than that they were translating Jesus' original words into Greek, and not that they were translating an entire manuscript.

But we need not be worried at all, for Bauscher gives no examples of the apostles saying *ermayneuo*, “I translate,” *because this never occurs in the Greek New Testament.*¹¹ So for a seventh time Bauscher has shown himself to be using proofs that are not really proofs at all.

8—Correspondence of Terms for Greek and Aramaic

Bauscher's eighth proof attempts to show that the Greek “corresponds much better” with the Aramaic than the Aramaic with the Peshitta. Basically, all he is doing is showing that when the word “Greek” appears in the Greek New Testament, the word for “Aramaic” or “Greek” may appear in the Peshitta. This proves nothing, although a variety of numbers¹² are tossed about in an attempt to make this appear somehow logical.

9—Alep-Tau

Next, Bauscher points out that in verses where the Greek text has *theos* (God), the Aramaic often has no corresponding word, but instead “what appears to be a Divine code Name 'Alep-Tau.’” Firstly, had the Aramaic text of the New Testament chosen to translate the word God by the name *Elohim*, or *YHWH*, *Alep-Tau*, or anything else, this *would not prove anything about the origin of the text*. It is amazing how often Bauscher misses the fact that a difference between two texts often says nothing about which came from which. Secondly, the combination of the letters Aleph Tau have often been considered to be some sort of divine code name when they appear over and over in the Hebrew Bible, but they are nothing more than a Hebrew marker of the objective case. It seems that Bauscher is joining leagues of those who make codes out of simple grammatical occurrences.

10—General Perfection of the Aramaic Text

In this section, Bauscher tries to show places where the Greek text is flawed and the Aramaic is allegedly perfect. One example is the famous so-called error of Matthew 1:17, where Matthew seems

11 The verb Bauscher is referring to *ermayneuo*, is a mistaken transcription of the word *hermēneuō*, with, although used in John 1:38, John 1:42, John 9:7, and Hebrews 7:2, never means “I translate” anywhere in the New Testament. I provide all four verses in the King James Version as proof of this fact (you may judge for yourself whether any of these verses declare the original writers to have written in Aramaic, and you may consult other translations or the Greek itself if you distrust my quotation) [underlining is added to show the correct translation of *hermēneuō*:

John 1:38 – Then Jesus, turned, and saw them following, and saith to them, What seek ye? They said to him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou?

John 1:42 – And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone.

John 9:7-- And said to him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.) He went his way, therefore, and washed, and came seeing.

Hebrews 7:2 – To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace;

12 The lack of logic in this paragraph is excelled only by the variety of numbers in it (11, 20, 22, and 36) and percentages (31, 56, 90, 100%), all of which are indeed statistics, but none of which, unfortunately, actually prove any particular point.

to be saying that there are 42 generations from Abraham to Jesus, when in fact there are forty-one. Bauscher immediately seizes upon this as an error of the Greek text and ingeniously tries to solve it by pleading for a special interpretation of the Aramaic word *Gabra* to suggest that Jesus' mother Mary was both the daughter of a Joseph and the husband of a Joseph. A much easier explanation of the verse is that we must take it at face value and count the generations the way the verse suggests, which then eliminates the difficulty.¹³ More could be said about the questionable way in which he uses the flexibility of Aramaic in his attempt to show its perfection, but if there is no error in the Greek text, it cannot be corrected in the Aramaic.

In Matthew 27:9, Bauscher claims an error in the Greek in that the Greek quotes Jeremiah as saying something which is not found in the book of Jeremiah. The Peshitta, however, simply cites the source as, "the prophet." According to Bauscher, this is an indication of the fact that the Peshitta is the correct and original text. However, it was common Jewish practice to identify a collection of writings by its beginning¹⁴, and because Jeremiah was the first of the prophetic books in many ancient Hebrew copies of the Old Testament, the whole section of prophetic books, including Zechariah, the source of the quotation¹⁵, may well have been referred to as "Jeremiah."¹⁶ Thus knowing that the use of Jeremiah is not merely a mistake, is it not possible that the translator of the Peshitta, seeing what he thought was a mistake in Matthew, therefore omitted the name Jeremiah in his mistaken effort to "correct" Matthew.

Similarly, his arguments that the Greek text has "bad grammar" and the Peshitta has no such grammatical problems do not prove anything, as we have no reason to believe that the apostles possessed such good grammar, nor that the New Testament was written in anything more dignified than the rough and ungrammatical speech of commoners. In fact, in Acts, the people listening as the apostle Peter gave his miraculous speech under God's inspiration quickly noticed that the apostles "were unlearned and ignorant men" (Acts 4:13). The grammar, then, proves nothing, but if it did would argue for a Greek New Testament produced by ignorant men and translated into the Aramaic Peshitta by a

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- 13 Matthew 1:17 says (KJV), "So all the generations from Abraham to David *are* fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon *are* fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ *are* fourteen generations." Those who assume that this verse demands a total of 42 generations are missing the fact that David is counted in both the first and second groups, thus allowing 41 generations to be divided into three groups of 14. The groups of fourteen are thus first (1) Abraham, (2) Isaac, (3) Jacob, (4) Judah, (5) Perez, (6) Hezron, (7) Aram, (8) Amminadab, (9) Nahshon, (10) Salmon, (11) Boaz, (12) Obed, (13) Jesse, (14); second (1) David, (2) Solomon, (3) Rehoboam, (4) Abijah, (5) Asa, (6) Jehoshaphat, (7) Joram, (8) Uzziah, (9) Jotham, (10) Ahaz, (11) Hezekiah, (12) Manasseh, (13) Amon, (14) Josiah; and (1) Jechoniah, (2) Shealtiel, (3) Zerubbabel, (4) Abiud, (5) Eliakim, (6) Azor, (7) Zadok, (8) Achim, (9) Eliud, (10) Eleazar, (11) Matthan, (12) Jacob, (13) Joseph, and (14) Jesus Christ. So there is no problem for the Peshitta to resolve.
- 14 Compare, for example, that because the Old Testament begins with the *Torah* (Pentateuch), the whole Old Testament is sometimes referred to as the Torah to this day. The book of Genesis begins with the word *Bereshith*, and is thus called in Hebrew, *Bereshith*. The book of Exodus' first noun is *Shemoth*, and therefore is called *Shemoth*. Jesus, referring to the common practice of dividing the Old Testament into the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings, refers to the whole "Writings" by the word *Psalms*, which is the first of the books of the Writings section of the Old Testament in Hebrew Bibles (Luke 24:4).
- 15 Some scholars believe the quotation also contains elements from Jeremiah, but the principle of the prophetic books being referred to as "Jeremiah" altogether retains its significance whether the quote in Matthew is from Zechariah alone or from Jeremiah and Zechariah together.
- 16 Compare the following: "Matthew probably attributed the text to Jeremiah because Jeremiah, in many Hebrew manuscripts, headed up the collection of the prophets and his name was used to designate all in the collection. Our book titles with those chapter and verse divisions are a fairly recent innovation. Also Matthew may have attributed this quotation to Jeremiah because this text was paired with Jeremiah 18:1-4; 32:6-9. Thus he used the name of the better known and more prominent prophet. In fact, not one of the four other places where the New Testament quotes from Zechariah does it mention his name (Mt 21:4-5; 26:31; Jn 12:12-14; 19:37)." --Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Hard Sayings of the Old Testament* (InterVarsity Press, 1988), p. 242.

much more educated person.

10—Aramaic is the Natural Choice

Bauscher's tenth proof is that the use of Aramaic is consistent with the fact that Aramaic and Hebrew were holy tongues, while Greek was pagan. This proof does not hold true, because there is no reason to suppose that Aramaic is holy, now that Greek is by nature pagan. In fact, if the goal of the gospel was to reach all nations (and it was) it makes more sense for Greek to be chosen, because it was far more widely spoken throughout the Mediterranean world than Aramaic. Again, Bauscher shows himself illogical.

11—Entropy Levels

The Entropy Level argument, wrapped in statistics just like some previous arguments, boils down to this: because the Peshitta contains more prepositions, personal pronouns, and conjunctions, it must be the source. He also shows that the Hebrew Bible contains more prepositions, personal pronouns, and conjunctions than the Greek LXX translation. His argument, then, is that a translator always tends to use less of these sorts of words. What he fails to recognize is that this difference can be explained in terms of the difference in structure between Hebrew and Aramaic, and Greek, which, being a highly inflected language, uses inflections instead of some prepositions, personal pronouns, etc. So this argument really shows nothing except the different natures of the languages involved.

12—The Divinity of the Peshitta

Next, Bausch argues that the Peshitta's use of stronger language in pointing out the divinity of Christ makes it original. As with his previous arguments however, this number-wrapped argument disintegrates upon examination, as there is no reason to suppose that a translation would always use weaker language in pointing out the divinity of Christ. On the contrary, because of the intense debate over whether Christ was indeed God or not that occurred in the early centuries of the Christian era, it is quite likely that a Greek-to-Aramaic translator who believed in the divinity of Christ would make sure to translate Greek passages in a way which most clearly reflected his view of their meanings.

13—My Words Shall Not Pass Away

Jesus prophesied in Matthew 24:35 that “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall never pass away.” According to Bauscher, a Greek New Testament would mean that Jesus' words passed away, because he spoke in Aramaic. But even supposing that Jesus spoke in Aramaic but his words were recorded by divinely inspired writers in Greek, this would not mean that his words passed away. Bauscher, in his insistence that this passage must refer only to the exact Aramaic words of Christ, is adding something to the gospel that was never intended to be a part of it.

Conclusion

And so we must conclude that all thirteen of Bauscher's so-called proofs of the primacy of the Aramaic New Testament are nothing more than idle claims, sometimes coupled with facts irrelevant to the point at hand. Until real evidence can be produced for Aramaic primacy, the consensus of scholars who do not twist the data to their own purposes must remain that the Aramaic Peshitta was translated from the Greek, and therefore only has a secondary level of authority.