

## Doctrine of Biblical Languages

1. The original manuscripts were written in four different languages. The principle two are Hebrew and Greek with a scintilla of Chaldean (basically found in the Book of Daniel) and Aramaic (found primarily in the New Testament where words like Isaiah have Aramaic spellings).
2. A brief history of Latin, Greek and Aramaic will help us understand why we find no Latin and little Aramaic in the New Testament, even though Jesus came as the God man during the “heyday” of the Roman Empire, in an area where Aramaic was spoken in the streets, that is to say, in the provinces of Galilee and Judah.

### Latin

The native language of the Romans was Latin, an Italic language the grammar of which relies little on word order, conveying meaning through a system of affixes attached to word stems. Its alphabet was based on the Etruscan alphabet (an ancient system of communication used in the region of Italy now known as Tuscany), which in turn was based on the Greek alphabet. Now while Latin remained the commercial and legal language of the Roman Empire, Greek came to be the language spoken by the elite, as most of the literature studied by Romans was written in Greek. Latin in the eastern empire of Rome (the Byzantine Empire) was never able to replace Greek even as the spoken language. Clearly literature was written in Greek both in the western and eastern empires thus one would expect the New Testament to be written in Greek. Latin was, however, spoken extensively in the Roman army. In 400 A.D. Jerome translated the Bible into Latin and thus gave us the Vulgate or Catholic Bible.

### Greek

Classical Greek was the language of Athens which spread north through Macedonia and the many islands located off the shores of Greece. One of the most famous of texts studied was the Iliad and the Odyssey written by Homer in c. 800 B.C. Many of Homer’s poems were, and remain popular reading among intellectuals.

### Koine Greek

Koine for common, is a term which had been previously applied by ancient scholars to several forms of Greek speech. Koine arose as a common dialect within the armies of Alexander the Great. Under Alexander’s leadership, who colonized the known world, this newly formed common dialect was spoken from Egypt to Mesopotamia, by fiat.

Though elements of Koine took shape during the Classical era, the post-Classical period of Koine Greek is defined as beginning with the death of Alexander in c. 320 B.C. The New Testament was written in Koine with only a smattering of Aramaic. Aramaic was a combination of Hebrew and Chaldean and it is generally believed the Jews of the 1st century A.D. spoke Aramaic with a dwindling number using Hebrew as a native language.

Many learned Hebrew as a liturgical language. Again however literature was written in either the Classical or Koine Greek.

## Hebrew

Little needs to be said of the language of the Old Testament. Hebrew was an offshoot of Chaldean and its alphabet is very similar to that of the Chaldean's living in Babylon. Jews wanting to know the Old Testament had to learn Hebrew; thus many religious schools were established for that purpose. This, of course, included schools for Rabbis. The Hebrew Old Testament was translated into the Classical Greek in c. 250 B.C. at Alexandria Egypt at the command of Ptolemy Philadelphus.

The Septuagint helped substantiate the genuineness of the Hebrew text. Ptolemy was renowned as a patron of literature and it was at his behest that the great library at Alexandria was established. Ptolemy's librarian aroused the king's interest in the Jewish law and advised him to send a delegation to the high priest Eleazar at Jerusalem. The high priest selected 72 translators who took up residence on the Island of Pharos. In c. 250 B.C. they completed their work and presented a copy to Ptolemy. The Septuagint helped bridge the "textual criticism gap" by its substantial agreement with the Hebrew Old Testament text.

## Conclusion

Three languages, Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek influenced each other, especially Hebrew and Aramaic. The influence of the Greek language was best felt in the Septuagint and, of course, the New Testament. One must keep in mind that Judah and Galilee were located in what we call the eastern Roman Empire where Latin never replaced Greek either as a spoken language or as a language for literary works. Given the fact that Koine had become popular throughout the world, no wonder then that the New Testament was written in the Koine Greek.

All the more remarkable is the fact that more than 40 men, in three languages and from three different continents, spanning 60 generations and 1600 years, produced the Bible. This, alone, is a remarkable feat. For more information on the authenticity of the Bible please go to [westbankbiblechurch.com](http://westbankbiblechurch.com) on the World Wide Web.