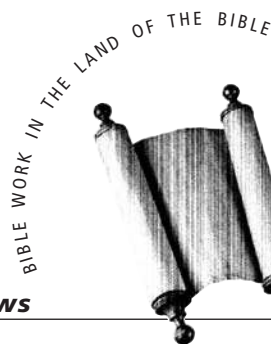


The "Flagship" of Hebrew New Testaments:

A Recent Revision by Israeli Messianic Jews

By **Gershon Nerel**



A new revision of the Hebrew New Testament, originally translated from the Greek by the German Lutheran Hebraist Franz Julius Delitzsch (1813–1890),¹ was released December 2003, under the auspices of the Israeli association "Streams in the Negev," Beer-Sheva.² This is, so far, the sixteenth edition of the Delitzsch Hebrew New Testament. For practical purposes, we shall name it briefly the "Negev Delitzsch Version" or just *Negev Version*.

The first complete edition of the Franz Delitzsch Hebrew New Testament was printed in Leipzig in 1877, and he revised his own text up to the 10th edition, printed in Berlin in 1889. On his sickbed Delitzsch approved small parts of the 11th edition that was prepared by Gustav Hermann Dalman, his student, colleague and friend (1855–1941).³ It was published in Leipzig in 1892.⁴ The 12th edition, revised by Dalman, was published in Berlin in 1901.⁵ The 12th edition of the Delitzsch-Dalman text also served for the preparation of the first *Hebrew Concordance* to the New Testament, a project which started in Israel in 1966 with J. Goldin, and was accomplished by P. Re'emi in 1974.⁶

1 "Dr. Franz Delitzsch," *The Jewish Intelligence*, n.s., 6 (1890), 50–51; "Delitzsch, Franz Julius," *Encyclopaedia Hebraica*, 12 (1969) 646–648 (Hebrew).

2 Registered *Amuta* (Charity) no. 58-036-183-0, P.O.Box 118, Beer-Sheva 84100, Israel (ISBN 965-7254-00-0). See Zvi Sadan, "New Edition of the Delitzsch Translation," *Kivun*, 37, Jan.-Feb. 2004, 12 (Hebrew); "New Hebrew Bible," *Israel Today*, 65, June 2004, 23 (with some inaccurate data).

3 Julia Männchen, "Gustav Dalman and Jewish Missions," *Mishkan*, 14 (1991), 64–73.

4 Jean Carmignac, *Traductions hébraïques des Évangiles*, vol. 4, *Die vier Evangelien von Franz Delitzsch (1877–1890–1902)*, Introduction par Jean Carmignac, *Kritischer Apparat der zwölf Auflagen von Hubert Klein, Brépols, Turnhout (Belgique) 1984*, x; xxvii.

5 Jean Carmignac, *List*, xxvii.

6 *Analytical Concordance to the Delitzsch Hebrew Translation of the New Testament*, Compiled by Samuel Paul Re'emi, Nur Press, Jerusalem 1973–1974, 3 vols. See Jean Carmignac, p. xxx; See also Paul Re'emi, "Book Survey," *UCCI News* (Bulletin of The United Christian Council in Israel), vol.1, no. 3, Fall 1970, pp. 15–16; "Samuel Paul Re'emi: a Tribute," as told to Lo Kaye-Wilson by Clärli Re'emi, *The Messianic Jew and Hebrew Christian*, vol. 69, no. 4, Dec. 1996 - Feb. 1997, pp. 91–94; Gabriel Grossmann, op. "A Hebrew Concordance to the New Testament", Book Review, *Immanuel*, 4 (1974): 65. From time to time Re'emi used the pseudonym of P. Shafer, an anagram of his initials.

Two other editions of the Delitzsch translation, numbers 13 and 14, were actually based on the revised 12th edition by Dalman.⁷ The 14th edition was also reprinted in Tel Aviv in 1962, and is, de facto, the single “key” which is available today for accessing specific words in the concordance of P. Re’emi.⁸ The 15th edition of the Delitzsch Hebrew New Testament was published in Jerusalem by *Keren Ahvah Meshihit* (managed by Victor Smadja) in 2000. This project of *Keren ahvah Meshihit* started in 1998. The relatively few linguistic corrections were introduced by Mordechai Chen of Haifa, and according to the publisher, it is based on the 10th edition of 1889.⁹ Edition 15 also contains, among other additions, a Hebrew Glossary of difficult words, (*Milon L’Brit Ha’Hadasha*) and various maps.¹⁰

“Ancient” Hebrew Relevant for Today

Current readers of the Hebrew Bible have at their disposal two alternate versions of the New Testament – in modern and in “archaic” Hebrew. When we talk about “archaic” Hebrew, we mean *both* biblical and Mishnaic (post-biblical) Hebrew – two styles that Delitzsch skillfully combined in his text. Those who prefer today the “ancient” style over the contemporary colloquial Hebrew, point to the contribution of the “classical” style to the idiomatic uniformity with the Old Testament. This is enabled through the close syntax and even lexicography that promotes associative connections between Old and New Testaments.

Among the ongoing reprints of the New Testament in “classical” style one also finds today the translation begun in 1877 by the Jewish scholar Isaac Edward Salkinson (1820–1883), and published posthumously in 1885.¹¹ It was completed and revised after his death by Christian David Ginsburg.¹² This version of the Salkinson-Ginsburg Hebrew New Testament has been completed and edited to correspond to the Greek *Textus Receptus* (received text) by Eric (Aharon) Selig Gabe of London.¹³ This text is widely distributed within a bi-lingual format.¹⁴ In general, of

7 See Jean Carmignac, xxvii.

8 See Pinchas E. Lapidé, *Hebrew in the Church* (The Foundations of Jewish-Christian Dialogue), Translated from German by E. F. Rhodes, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1984, 89–91.

9 *Habrit Hahadasha, Keren Ahvah Meshihit (Messianic Brotherhood-Fund)*, Yanetz, P.O. Box 10382, Jerusalem 91103, Israel, October 2000; June 2003, 323.

10 See Victor Smadja, “Making Hebrew New Testaments...”, *Report from Jerusalem*, December 2000, 3.

11 See Hanna Scolnicov, “The Hebrew who Turned Christian: The First Translator of Shakespeare into the Holy Tongue,” in *Shakespeare Survey*, vol. 54: *Shakespeare and Religions*, Holland, Peter (ed.), Nov. 2001, 182–183. My thanks to Jorge Quinonez for showing me this reference.

12 Pinchas E. Lapidé, 92.

13 The first revised edition was published in 1996, and the third edition appeared in 2000.

14 See D.B. Gwilym-Jones, “The Salkinson-Ginsburg Hebrew New Testament,” *The Lamp and the Light*, vol. 6, no. 2, April-June 1984, p. 14, published by the *Society for Distributing Hebrew Scriptures*, directed by Eric R. Browning.

these two "classical" translations of Delitzsch on one hand and Salkinson-Ginsburg on the other, the better text, in my estimation, is the one produced by Delitzsch. This was also the opinion of the late Prof. Joseph Klausner.¹⁵

The Need for a Focused Revision

It is a fact that in the Land of Israel, where the revived Hebrew language is a daily living tongue, that many words have gradually adopted divided meanings. Nuances have changed. In a salient case, for example, the Mishnaic term *Sarsor*, i.e. mediator, (Gal 3:19-20; 1 Tim 2:5; Heb 8:6; 9:15; 12:24) actually became blasphemous within the biblical context. Presently it most often designates the middleman between a prostitute and her client. Obviously, therefore, it is more than misleading with regard to Messiah's role as intermediary between God and man. Consequently, although the original Delitzsch Hebrew New Testament contained no mistranslations, the reality of semantic dynamism of the last decades demands a careful amendment of the text. While focused obsolescence in the "Negev Delitzsch Version" was updated, the grammar and vocabulary rooted in the Old Testament was retained.

A "Hebraic New King James"

The authoritative status of the Franz Delitzsch Hebrew New Testament can be compared to the English Authorized Version, known popularly as the King James Bible. Precisely as with the authors of the New King James Version, the initiators of the "Negev Delitzsch Version" stated from the outset that it was not their purpose "to make a new translation ... but to make a good one better."¹⁶

Even today, 99% of Jewry finds no substantial justification for translating the Old Testament (*Tanach*) into modern Hebrew. It is accepted as *the* authentic and trustworthy text, and as such it is taught even to small children in elementary schools. Although with the New Testament the situation is different, because the original manuscripts exist only in Greek, still the adapted style and phraseology of classical Hebrew is most important for many Jews. This can be compared to the King James Bible, respected for being the *Textus Receptus* with regard to accuracy and authority. At the same time, it is well known that many regard the King James Version as an extremely literal translation. However, there is verity in the words of Jerusalemite Malcolm Lowe that "despite its antiquated vocabulary, it

15 See Reuven Lod (Robert Lisle Lindsey), "The Delitzsch and Salkinson Translations," *Hayahad*, May 1961 (no. 3), 7 (Hebrew). Cf. Idem, "The Delitzsch, Dalman and Salkinson Translations," *Hayahad*, April 1961 (no. 2), 7 (Hebrew).

16 *Holy Bible, The New King James Version*, Containing the Old and New Testaments, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, Tennessee 1982, iii.



can often speak to us more directly than many a modern translation."¹⁷ The same principle, actually, applies even more so to the Hebrew of the Delitzsch New Testament.

The current revision of the Delitzsch text made no attempt to revolutionize it, only to replace individual words or phrases which were considered as most problematic because they became unquestionably anachronistic. In other words, instead of terms that with the time became misleading or even defamatory, other appropriate terms were introduced. The first and leading choice for selecting a potential exchange was from the Old Testament. Only when a proper equivalent was not found, then Mishnaic Hebrew was employed.

History of the Project

Altogether, the revision project lasted about 10 years, from 1993 to 2003, with some intervals in the middle. Following the appearance of the *Annotated New Testament* in modern Hebrew,¹⁸ I suggested that a basic revision of the Delitzsch text is greatly needed.¹⁹ In order to implement this, practical steps began in 1993, when I approached Miriam Ronning/Ronen (formerly Syväntö) to work jointly on the project.²⁰ Two decades earlier Miriam (Mirja) contributed to the translation of the New Testament into modern Hebrew.²¹ For several years she also lectured on Bible Translation at the American Institute of Holy Land Studies on Mt. Zion. Additionally, she was also experienced in translating parts of the Bible into Finnish. Currently she and her husband Halvor run the "Home for Bible Translators" in Mevaseret-Zion near Jerusalem. At her home in Motza, Miriam and I scrutinized the Gospels and the Epistle to the Romans for almost two years, until 1995, in order to map the major corrections we considered most necessary. Then our common work came to an end. Between 1995–1998 my wife Sara and I occasionally consulted several experts about the continuation of the project, among them Yohanan Elihai (Jean Leroy) from Jerusalem, and Miriam Zeidan of the Beth-Hesda Messianic Congregation in Haifa. For many years Zeidan edited and revised numerous Hebrew books within academic settings.

The project restarted September 1998 in Moshav Yad Hashmona near Jerusalem, as Sara and I began anew the scanning process of the whole

17 Malcolm F. Lowe, "Modern Bible Translations – Blessing or Bane?", *Life and Work*, November 1988, 22.

18 *Habrit Hahadasha B'Ivrit Bat Zmanenu Im Hearot Vetziun Mekorot Yehudiim V'aherim* (The New Testament in Contemporary Hebrew with Annotations and References to Jewish and Other Sources), based on the 1976 translation into modern Hebrew, The Bible Society in Israel, Jerusalem 1991.

19 Gershon Nerel, "An Old Book in New Garb: The New Testament with Introductions," Book Review in *Zot Habrit*, vol. 3, Winter 1991–1992, 32–34 (Hebrew).

20 See Gershon Nerel, "The New Testament in Biblical Style – Comments and Update," *Zot Habrit*, vol. 4, Dec. 1993, 20–23 (Hebrew).

21 Under the directorship of Yoseph Atzmon, and was first printed at *Yanetz* in Jerusalem (1976).

New Testament, redefining the areas of linguistic difficulties. Our work on the text lasted for three years, until the end of 2001. During this time Sara typed the corrected text on computer, so the entire "Negev Delitzsch Version," including the amended punctuation, was computerized. Members of the Messianic Home Assembly at Yad Hashmona, among them David and Eli Bar David, contributed helpful observations. Miriam Zeidan carefully assisted with several proofreadings. The preparations for the printing and binding of this version continued in 2002–2003, as did the photocopying in Finland of the Hebrew Old Testament.

Methodology

The current revision is based on the 8th edition of the Delitzsch Hebrew New Testament,²² which is still the most popular among Israelis who read the Delitzsch text. In addition to the Received Text of the Greek New Testament,²³ the revisers made use of several texts and translations when selecting a specific word in Hebrew, from a possibility of many synonyms, as follows: The Peshitta;²⁴ the *Berit Hadasha Al-pi HaMashiah* (Hebrew New Testament according to the Messiah);²⁵ *Habit HaHadasha Al-pi HaMashiah Im Nekudot Uteamim* (The New Testament according to the Messiah with Punctuation – Hebrew vowels - and Accentuations);²⁶ The Hebrew New Testament of Isaac Salkinson and David Ginzburg;²⁷ and the *Sefer Habritot* (Book of the Covenants – Tanach and the New Testament).²⁸

The main principles for preparing the "Negev Revision" focused on the following points: First, top priority is given to vocabulary *terms* which need immediate replacement; second, modification of syntax structures in verses which are highly problematic; third, high sensitivity with regard to concepts with special theological implications.

- 22 For a "know-how" to recognize the 8th edition see Jean Carmignac, p. xxvii. Another method to easily distinguish between the 8th edition and the 11th–12th editions is based on the Hebrew translation of Luke 11:21 – see Zvi Sadan and Hadas Keren (Hilary Le Cornu), *The Complete Hebrew Dictionary to the Greek of the New Testament*, Experimental Edition (α – ι), Jerusalem 1999 (Hebrew Introduction), 4.
- 23 *Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*, Third Edition, Edited by Jay P. Green, Sr., Baker Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1998. I owe special thanks to Mary Little for her assistance.
- 24 *The New Covenant Aramaic Peshitta Text* (K'yama Hadta/Diyateke Hadata), With a Hebrew Translation, Edited by the Aramaic Scriptures Research Society in Israel, The Bible Society, Jerusalem 1986.
- 25 Published in London in 1838 by the London Jews Society (LJS), translated by Alexander McCaul, Reichardt and Michael Solomon Alexander, who became the first Anglican Jewish Bishop in Jerusalem, (1841–1845).
- 26 Published in London in 1886 at the Operative Institution, Palestine Place, by the London Jews Society (LJS).
- 27 Printed for the Trinitarian Bible Society at the Cambridge University Press and promoted today by the Society for Distributing the Holy Scriptures to the Jews, London.
- 28 The Bible Society in Israel, Jerusalem 1991.



Major Setup Alterations

In order to enable unbroken reading of the text, and to avoid possible confusion, the different kinds of brackets (single or double) in the 8th edition were deleted in the *Negev Version*. In other words, the wording within the brackets were retained, while the signs of the parentheses – square and round brackets - were removed. Thus, for example, in order to bypass the fragmented format of the *Lord's Prayer* in the Gospel of Luke (11:2-4) the words "in heaven," "your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," and "but deliver us from the evil one" are left within the text without brackets. The same is done with the sentence "For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, amen" (Matt 6:13). Because the words do appear in the text anyway, the absence of the various brackets provides the text with a sense of completion rather than obscurity.²⁹ However, in one exceptional place the brackets were still left in place, because of unclear identification of Emmaus and her distance from Jerusalem (Luke 24:13).

Additionally, instead of the old format of having two textual possibilities for using a certain word, marked by adding an asterisk, as for example in Matthew 23:35 and in Acts 27:2,19, we left only one word which made scriptural and logical sense. However, in the difficult case of "wisdom is justified by her children" (Matt 11:19), the other possible wording of "by her acts" was mentioned in the bottom of the page. In other words, the fluency of the text itself is kept intact. In other cases, also marked by an asterisk, when the meaning of the two optional wordings looked reasonable, they were *both* kept in place, for completing each other, as for example "the fruit of the spirit and light" (Eph 5:9), and "washed and redeemed us" (Rev 1:5).

Technically, also punctuation inaccuracies were amended, as for example, *Garger* (seed) instead of *Gargar* (Matt 13:31) and *Haavir* (air) instead of *Haaver* (Eph 2:2). Also, in all places where the text contains quotations from the Old Testament, on the bottom of each page references were added to easily find the original quote.

Major Terminological Alterations

Altogether, more than 300 terminological and punctuation corrections were made. The broad subdivision of the alterations is as follows:

Matt: 52	Mark: 39	Luke: 43	John: 31
Acts: 57	Rom: 22	I Cor: 27	II Cor: 16
Gal: 9	Eph: 8	Rev: 24	

²⁹ See also, for example, Matt 6:13 in the *Holy Bible – The New King James Version*, where note no. 26 is added instead of the bracket, explaining that certain words are omitted in other versions.

An additional major modification relates to the sign that denotes the name of God. Within all the first 10 editions of the Delitzsch Hebrew New Testament, the word God (in Hebrew *Adonai*) is represented symbolically by two Hebrew letters יי (double *Yod*).³⁰ Interestingly, the figurative substitute of יי for יהוה (YHWH) already appeared in Jewish medieval manuscripts from the Cairo Geniza. As a matter of fact, Delitzsch placed יי in most verses where the Greek *Lord* or *Master* (Κύριος) is mentioned.

Obviously, in the Hebrew language, unlike any other tongue, it does make a difference whether in the text appears "merely" *Lord* or YHWH, especially because this immediately refers to Divinity. Retrospectively, it would be contrary to all reasonable expectations that Delitzsch was unaware of this point. This can be easily proven by Delitzsch's first translation of a New Testament book – the Epistle to the Romans (1870).³¹ Thus, within his pilot translation of Romans, only יהוה is used. De facto, in his initial translation to Romans, Delitzsch followed the former LJS model of the 1836 and 1886 translations, where יהוה is used. However, Jean Carmignac ignores this fact in his Introduction, so the question remains open as to why in all first 10 editions of Delitzsch there is a systematic insistence on יי. Nonetheless, within the entire text of the *Negev Revision* instead of the two Hebrew letters יי, which do not appear in the Old Testament, the biblical Tetragrammaton יהוה (YHWH) was introduced. This is another linguistic way to emphasize the dynamic and organic unity between Old and New Testaments. It is the same God of both covenants.

Typing and Printing

When the entire *Negev Revision* was computerized, the same pagination of the 8th edition was preserved. The idea behind that was to facilitate the use of the text for those who have already memorized various verses in a specific location. The new issue contains 483 pages, as it is in the 8th edition, in the format of 20x13 cm., and is printed on ultra-thin paper (Bible paper), bound with dark-blue hard cover.

In order to maintain the unity of the Hebraic Bible from Genesis to Revelation, the *Negev Revision* was attached to the *Snaith Bible*, the 1977 edition of *Torah, Neviim, Ketuvim* (Old Testament) edited by Norman Henry Snaith.³² This edition of the Bible Society in Israel was photocopied and reprinted with no alterations whatever.

Olavi Syväntö of Omer, near Beer Sheva, and his friends in Finland were the financial sponsors of the entire project. Olavi, son of the late Bible distributor in the land, Kaarlo Syväntö, also coordinated work with the

30 See, for example, Jean Carmignac, the critical apparatus for Matt 1:20; 24, p. 2.

31 Paulus des Apostels *Brief an die Römer*, aus dem Griechischen Urtext auf Grund des Sinai-Codex in das Hebräische Übersetzt und aus Talmud und Midrasch Erläutert, von Franz Delitzsch, Leipzig, Dörffling und Franke, 1870.

32 The Hebrew Bible edited by Norman Henry Snaith was published by the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1958. See <http://www.hebrew-streams.org/works/tapuchim/nhsnaith.html>



printers in Finland, mainly with Pentty Ruohotie. Totally, 10,000 exemplars were printed. Within each and every copy of this edition, on the back of the front cover it is printed "Not for Sale," highlighting the fact that it has no commercial value but is distributed freely.

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Summary

Almost a century and a half after its first publication in 1877, the "Flagship Hebrew New Testament" remains the work of Franz Julius Delitzsch. He discovered that he was obliged to use both biblical and Mishnaic Hebrew expressions, and this led him to the further discovery that many passages could only be understood adequately after they had been translated back to a Hebrew – partially related to Old Testament Hebrew and partially to rabbinic Hebrew.

Throughout the whole process of the recent revision, it became absolutely clear that Delitzsch rarely made mistakes with the selection of words from the Old Testament for his translation. The late Professor David Flusser of the Hebrew University highlighted the fact that the discovery of the *Hebraic Dead Sea Scrolls* underlines the high probability that the approach of "the great Delitzsch" was indeed correct – so he was able in many instances to reconstruct the earlier Hebrew, not Aramaic, prototype (Vorlage).³³

Unlike the Salkinson-Ginsburg version, the Delitzsch mode of expression is not "too poetic" or flowery. However, in its rather prosaic style it sounds more applicable to those who speak fluent Hebrew.

Finally, a distinguishing feature of the *Negev Version* is an updated database, although yet incomplete, of the Delitzsch Hebrew New Testament. It is hoped that the current revision will serve as an improved tool to contextualize the message of the New Testament in our times. Although the *Negev Version* is not the last word in a long line of revisions, it is also hoped that with further updates to the database, the next project will be a new concordance. Thus, as the Delitzsch New Testament uniquely stands the test of time, it will no doubt remain a monumental spiritual legacy.

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33 David Flusser, "Foreword", *Analytical Concordance to the Delitzsch Hebrew Translation of the New Testament*, Compiled by Samuel Paul Re'emi, Nur Press, Jerusalem 1973, vol. 1, n.p.