STORIES OF JEWISH CHRIST

The Bible does not need to be rewritten, but it needs to be reread.
Five Types of Hebraisms in the Gospels
IN THIS LECTURE:

1. Five Types of Hebraisms in New Testament Texts
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2. Examples of Hebraisms
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1. Five Types of Hebraisms in New Testament Texts
2. Examples of Hebraisms
3. Implications of Hebraisms in the Gospels
Hebraisms in the New Testament
What is a Hebraism?

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Hebraisms are not such an unusual phenomenon. It is natural for languages to borrow from other languages. It is also natural for people who are multi-lingual to default to the most familiar or comfortable terminology, especially when they are in a multi-lingual environment; where they will most likely be easily understood by others.

New Testament Hebraisms are sometimes called Semitisms since some of them are Hebraisms and others are Aramaisms.
The writers of the New Testament were Jews and they could not avoid occasionally defaulting to Hebrew, throwing in Aramaic words and using more familiar Semitic patterns of grammar while writing in Greek. They used idiomatic speech that came from Hebrew and at times it is noticeable that they are translating. There are five types of Hebraisms that one most often encounters in the gospels and in the larger New Testament collection of writings:
The writers of the New Testament were Jews and they could not avoid occasionally defaulting to Hebrew, throwing in Aramaic words and using more familiar Semitic patterns of grammar while writing in Greek. They used idiomatic speech that came from Hebrew and at times it is noticeable that they are translating. There are five types of Hebraisms that one most often encounters in the gospels and in the larger New Testament collection of writings:

1. Nominal Hebraisms
2. Etymological Hebraisms
3. Grammatical Hebraisms
4. Literary Hebraisms
5. Idiomatic Hebraisms
Nominal and Etymological Hebraisms
Aaron (Ἀαρών) - אהרן
Abraham (Ἀβραάμ) - אברהם
Arabia (Ἀραβία) - ערב
Moses (Μωσεύς) - משה
Jerusalem (Ἱερουσαλήμ) - ירושלים
Καπερναούμ (kapernaoum) - כפר נחום
Βηθλεέμ (bethleem) - בيت לחם
howera (hosanna) - הושיעה נא
רבי (rabbai) - רב
רבוני (rabbouni) - רבוני
גי בּוֹ-הָנֶם (geenna) - גֵּרְנָה
הללו יִה (allelouia) - הלל יי
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The Hebrew Bible, however, is notorious for using the meaning of Hebrew names to make a point. Adam’s name is connected to Hebrew word for “soil” אֲדָמָה (adamah), because he was made from the earth. Noah’s parents wanted rest, so they called their son Noach, which from the word “rest” in Hebrew.
So Nominal and Etymological Hebraisms do not change much except when they convey a very particular meaning that neither Greek nor English can convey. Here is an example from the gospel of Matthew.
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“She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” (Matt 1:21).

The angel tells Jesus’ mother to give him a particular name and explains that there is a reason for that – “for he will save his people”. But what does the name “Jesus” have to do with salvation?
If the angel said, “you shall call his name Savior because he will save” that would make sense, but “Jesus” does not mean “Savior” in English nor in Greek. Yet the Hebrew equivalent of that name means that exactly. So although Matthew used Greek, he had the meaning of a Hebrew name in mind.
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Jesus’ name in Greek is Ἰησοῦς (iesous) which is a transliteration of a Hebrew name יְهوֹשֻׁע (yehoshua). That name was adapted into English as Joshua. So Jesus is Joshua and in Greek these names are indistinguishable.
But as most languages do, Hebrew changed over the centuries. After the Israelites returned from Babylon they continued to use traditional Hebrew names, yet they started to shorten יְהוֹשֻׁע (yehoshua) to יֵישוּע (yeshua), which is how the name Joshua was most commonly spelled in the 1st century.
Both names יְהוֹשֻׁע (yehoshua) and יֵושָע (yeshua), come from the Hebrew verb יָשָׁע (yasha) which means “to save”. So Jesus’ name in Hebrew actually means “one that saves”.

In Greek and English no one can discern that meaning. So the angel’s words make sense only if you know Hebrew.
The name יְשׁוּע (yeshu) is how Jesus’ name is pronounced in Modern Hebrew. It may be an Aramaic version of יְשׁוּעַ (yeshua), or even further shortened Hebrew from of יְהוֹשֻׁע (yehoshua).
There is a derogatory connotation connected to the name Yeshu. In many rabbinic and messianic Jewish circles it is believed that Yeshu is a derogatory way to say Jesus. Babylonian Talmud (Sanhedrin 43a) says that this is an acronym that comes from the phrase יִמָּחِ שְּמוֹ וְזִכְרָו (yimach shemo vezichro) "may his name and his memory be erased".
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Some scholars suspect that this is a later, medieval era polemical addition to the Talmud. Most Hebrew-speaking Jews, however are not aware of this connotation and use the name Yeshu for Jesus with no intent of disrespect.
Famous Russian Jewish artist Mark Chagall depicted the crucifixion of Yeshu (Jesus) with Aramaic inscription over the cross.

ישו הנוצרי מלך יידודיאי
Jesus of Nazareth, the King of Jews
However, if the sign over the cross was not in Aramaic, but in Hebrew it would have been spelled a little differently.

ישוע הנוצרי ומלך היהודים
Jesus of Nazareth, (and) King of the Jews

This Hebrew inscription would reveal another acronym - יהוה - God's special covenant name.
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Grammatical Hebraisms
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This is also a common occurrence in any language. When a person learns a new language and tries using it their sentences are pieced together in a strange way for a person who speaks that language natively. This happens because in their mind the speaker is translating. Many things just do not translate smoothly.
Take for example how the King James version created a new kind of English. It says, “fear not, for I am with you”. This is strange in modern English. We would normally say “Do not fear, because I am with you” But the King James translation of the Bible is mimicking the source grammar and in Greek it literally says in that order “fear not” instead of the more normative “do not fear” The “fear not” is natural and normal to Greek but was not normal to English, until the King James Bible started to influence English, and now many people are not fazed by this.
Consider how the Koine Greek phrase καὶ ἐγένετο (kai egeneto) “and it came to pass” reflects and mimics a very common Hebrew grammatical construction וַיְהִי (vayehi) “and it happened/ came to pass”
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“And it came to pass that while they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth” (Luke 2:6)

“And it came to pass after many days, that the word of the LORD came to Elijah…” (1Kings 18:1)
Sometimes the use of the conjunction καὶ (kai) “and” in NT Greek mimics the use of Hebrew conjunction י (vav) “and” in narratives.
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“And the Lord sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him... the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveler unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock... but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him.” (2 Sam 12:1-4 KJV)
“Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and (kai) the Son of Man will be delivered up to the chief priests and scribes, and (kai) they will condemn him to death, and (kai) they will deliver him up to the Gentiles. And (kai) they will mock him and (kai) spit upon him and (kai) scourge him and (kai) kill him, and (kai) three days later he will rise again.” (Mark 10:33-34)
“Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and (καὶ) the Son of Man will be delivered up to the chief priests and scribes, and (καὶ) they will condemn him to death, and (καὶ) they will deliver him up to the Gentiles. And (καὶ) they will mock him and (καὶ) spit upon him and (καὶ) scourge him and (καὶ) kill him, and (καὶ) three days later he will rise again.” (Mark 10:33-34)

In proper Greek the sentences are typically built of out many clauses, often joined by coordinating and subordinating conjunctions. Hebrew uses a much simpler structure where the conjunction “and” is simply attached to each verb. This creates a consecutive story-telling flow “and he went, and he said, and he did”. Writing in Koine Judeo-Greek the author of Mark imitates Hebrew.
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Literary Hebraisms
A literary Hebraism is when the style typical to Hebrew literature is borrowed and carried over into non-Hebrew literature.

A good example is ancient Hebrew poetry. Western poetry that many people are familiar with today is usually based on patterns of similar sound (you, slew, true, blue, crew, flew, dew, few...). Rhyme and rhythm, length of phrases all play a big role in poetry.
Ancient Hebrew poetry is built on parallelism of thoughts and ideas instead. The familiar rhyme will not be present, but instead the second stanza will say something very similar to the first one. This is Hebrew parallelism, a balanced repetition typical to the book of Psalms.
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1 The heavens are telling of the glory of God;
And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.
2 Day to day pours forth speech,
And night to night reveals knowledge. (Ps 19:1-2)
6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death... 9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name (Eph 5:6-9)
Another kind of a literary Hebraism is called “chiasm” The term comes from Greek letter X “Chi”. Chiasm is a writing style that uses a unique repetition pattern for emphasis and clarification.
This kind of repetitive form appears throughout the Bible but most of the time requires skill to see it in the original text. The Chiasm is built on the principle of poetic parallelism, but the pattern has to be discerned in a much greater context, often spanning several sentences.
A1 As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will never leave you nor forsake you (5b)

B1 Be strong and courageous ... be strong and very courageous (6,7a)

C1 Be careful to obey all the law ... that you may be successful (7b)

D1 Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth (8a)

D2 Mediate on it day and night (8b)

C2 Be careful to do everything written in it ... you may be prosperous and successful (8c)

B2 Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged (9a)

A2 for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go. (9b)
A1 Son can do nothing of Himself, unless *it is* something He sees the Father doing (19b)

B1 For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son (21a)

C1 He has given all judgment to the Son (22b)

D1 he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life (24)

D2 the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live (25)

C2 and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is *the* Son of Man. (27)

B2 all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth (28-29)

A2 I can do nothing on My own initiative...I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. (30)

John 5:19-30
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Idiomatic Hebraisms
Idiomatic Hebraisms are special phrases or sayings that are typical to Hebrew, but may sound strange, unusual or even nonsensical in another language. Quite often people recognize idioms intuitively and they know that this is not literal language to be taken at face value. But sometimes the idioms are very cultural and are hard to decipher. The gospel texts are full of Idiomatic Hebraisms like that.
“When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.”

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In Hebrew פָנֶה (paneh) “face” does not just mean face as the front of one’s skull. It also means something before one (in front of), one’s appearance and even one’s being and physical presence.
Jacob fled from “the face of” Esau (Gen. 35:1,7)
Moses “hid his face” in fear (Ex. 3:6)
God “sets his face against” idolaters (Lev. 20:3-6).
Grieving Joseph “fell on the face of” his father (Gen. 50:1)
Jehu “lifted up his face” (2 Kgs 9:32)
So he (Jacob) fled with all that he had; and he arose and crossed the Euphrates River, and set his face toward the hill country of Gilead. (Gen 31:21 NASB)
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In verse 21 “setting one’s face” is a Hebrew idiom that shows that a person turned (faced) a particular direction and intended to go there.
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The word “loins” in Hebrew is מָתְנֵי (matnaim). It is a section of muscles between ribs and hips - one’s muscle core. To gird means to tie, to bind, to strengthen, to prepare.
God told Jeremiah to gird up his loins, arise and speak unto Judah (Jer. 1:17)

God told Job: "Gird up your loins like a man; for I will demand of you" (Job 38:3, 40:7)

Elijah girded up his loins and outran Ahab’s chariot (1 Kings 18:41-46)
The LORD reigns, He is clothed with majesty, The LORD has clothed and **girded Himself with strength**; Indeed, the world is firmly established, it will not be moved. (Ps 93:1)

You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; You have loosed my sackcloth and **girded me with gladness** (Ps 30:11)
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To gird means to prepare, to equip, to strengthen. The loins of one’s διάνοια (dianoia) “mind, thinking, thought” is the core of one’s thought. So the idiom means "prepare or equip your thinking or understanding"
Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” (Matt 19:24)
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This phrase is an idiom. The camel is something very large. The eye of a needle is something quite small. This is an example of Semitic idiomatic exaggeration. Something very large cannot fit through a very small opening.

So why do you see a picture of an elephant instead of a camel?
Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”
(Matt 19:24)
Again I say to you, it is easier for a **camel to go through the eye of a needle**, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

(Matt 19:24)

Because it does not matter as long as the animal is very big in comparison. The idiom is not about those items. It is about the difficulty of entering God’s kingdom, about something that seems impossible.

There is a similar saying in the Talmud, “They do not show... an elephant going through the eye of a needle.” (Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 55b)
“Adultery by looking” a sin committed in thought and intent is another example of Semitic exaggeration. This is hyperbolic speech crafted for emphasis, in this case of the seriousness of sin.
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“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery’; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (Matt 5:27-28)
Just like Jesus, ancient rabbis of later generations used idiomatic exaggeration in their sermons.

“In regards to the commandment ‘do not commit adultery’ it has been taught, explained Rav Simeon son of Lakish, that anyone who commits an adultery physically with his body shall be called an adulterer, but we say to you that anyone who commits adultery with his eye shall be called an adulterer. (Homiletic Midrash from Pesikta Rabbati 24 – c. 9th century CE)
Implications of Hebraisms in the Gospels
Some who discovered the presence of Hebraisms in the Greek texts of the Gospels think that they must have been originally written in Hebrew. That is a reasonable idea, but that means that the Greek manuscripts we possess are really translations of the Hebrew originals.
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Such conclusion, however, has no tangible proof. It is more likely that Jews who wrote the New Testament simply thought multilingually and in Hebrew, while penning down their thoughts in Koine Judeo-Greek.
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All known Hebrew gospel manuscripts are dated to the middle ages. The texts that come the closest to this theory are actually Aramaic gospels. But even they are not from the 1st century. They later translations of Greek (3-5 cent.) and not the other way around.
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