Hebrew vs. Greek Thinking

Many people don't realize it, but the Bible is Jewish from cover to cover; in the final analysis, the New Testament imported all of its ideas from the Old Testament. Though written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek—the Bible has a thoroughly Hebrew punch line, throughout. Some scholars, like celebrated linguists Matthew Black and George Lamsa even say that the Gospels at least, originated in Aramaic!

But don't let the different languages fool you. The New Testament writers delivered concepts from the Old Testament to a Greek-speaking world, choosing Greek words to accurately represent Hebrew notions—much as today's translators search for words in their languages to faithfully portray the Greek. To understand the New Testament then, we must slip on the Jewish shoes of its writers—and walk with them through the text. This isn't easy for people in the west; strongly influenced by Greek thinking, we tend to view the Bible through Grecian eyes.

Not only do Westerners misunderstand Hebrew thinking, but we also incorrectly assume that New Testament writers attached Greek notions to what they derived from the Old Testament. Some even imagine that Greek thinking trumps earlier Hebrew thought because, they reason—the New Testament reveals more advanced truth than the Old Testament. In point of fact, the Old Testament blossoms in the New, though Greek and Hebrew culture can't coexist any more than matter and anti-matter:

• Greeks describe objects in relation to the way they look, while Hebrews describe objects in relation to the way they work. Hebrews, for example, would use the verb "write" to describe a pencil, while a Greek would use adjectives like "yellow," and "long" to do the same thing.

• Greeks describe objects in relation to the objects themselves, while Hebrews describe objects in relation to Hebrews themselves. A Greek would say, by way of illustration, "God is love," describing God in relation to God, while a Hebrew would say, "God loves me," describing God in relationship to himself.

• Greek nouns refer to people, places or things, while Hebrew nouns refer to the actions of people, places or things. Case in point: a Greek would blandly call parents, " father," or " mother," while a He- brew would dynamically refer to a father as, "the one who gives strength to the family" and a mother as "the one that binds the family together".

• Greeks view the world abstractly, through the mind, while Hebrews view the world concretely, through the senses. For instance, the Greek word for anger simply means—to make angry, while the Hebrew word for anger literally means—to breathe hard with flared nostrils.

• Taking the same line of argument further, abstract Greeks are more logical, while concrete Hebrews are more literal. Instead of relying on reasoning to connect actions, events, or ideas, Hebrews tell it like it is, with one twist: they like to open with a summary, and then give the details starting with square one. This explains why Moses first summarizes the creation story: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth," in Genesis 1:1; then returns to square one in 1:2 and begins a detailed account of what happened: "Now the earth was formless and empty; darkness covered the deep while the Spirit of God hovered over the water." Greek thinking scholars mistake the overlap for a gap between these verses; enlightened students see it for the Hebrew expression that it is.