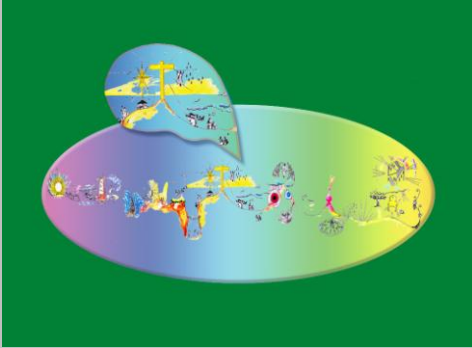


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We believe in one GOD, in three persons; FATHER, SON and HOLY SPIRIT. We regard the Bible (both Hebrew Bible and New Testaments) as the only infallible authoritative WORD OF GOD.

HULDAH MINISTRY aims to return to the Word Of God, founded on Hebrew background and to interpret it from Hebraic perspective, acknowledging that Jesus is a Jew and the Jewish-ness of His teaching as a continuation from the Hebrew Bible. The Ministry also aims to put His teaching into practice, to have a closer relationship with the Lord, Jesus Christ, and to regularly have a Christian fellowship so that this-worldly kingdom of God will materialise in the midst of the followers of Jesus here and now, as well as earnestly seeking Christ's Return to establish the otherworldly Kingdom of God on earth.

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HULDAH MINISTRY

LETTER TO THE BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST

【 JAPANESE LANGUAGE 】

Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth...The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan.) These were the three sons of Noah, and from them came the people who were scattered over the earth..."

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.

They said to each other... "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth."

But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. The LORD said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other."

So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel —because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

GENESIS 9-11.

This month we continue to trace findings and research of an Israelite, Joseph Eidelberg over the issue of the origins of the Japanese language and the Japanese people, along with his book entitled "The Biblical Hebrew Origin Of The Japanese People". Before introducing his findings of the Hebrew influence on the Japanese language, I would refer to brief history of Japan.

Until ten thousand years ago, Japan was still connected to the Asian continent by land. The separation occurred as a result of movements of the earth's crust. According to the Scripture it could be referred to the age of 'Peleg', which means "divided". The Scripture especially marks it as a significant event on earth, stating '*Two sons were born to Eber (i.e., "Hebrew", from whose line the Jewish people came): One was named Peleg, because in his time the earth was divided...*' (Gen.10:25). There are three main lines of interpretation for the biblical description of this event, but one is that there was a catastrophic and sudden geological event in which the earth was split up into its present continental masses. The continents seem to have once rapidly moved apart fairly early in human history and then slowly drifted to today's global topography. While the sea may have separated Japan from the rest of the Asian continent and thus kept Japan away from invaders, the distance has not been so far apart as to discourage the influence and assimilation of continental cultures. Thus, Japan and the rest of Asia have many cultures and traditions in common but Japan has managed to develop a highly independent and unique culture of its own.

Around the first century there was a collection of over one hundred small independent countries located in various parts of the islands. By the fourth century a relatively large country in the Kansai area of Japan had grown, and the family that finally consolidated the rule over the western half of Honshu, the northern half of Kyushu and all of Shikoku was the present imperial family. After consolidation of Japan into a single nation in the fourth century, successive emperors strengthened the foundations of the country. Although it is difficult to set a date of the nation's birth, according to two ancient chronicles written in the eighth century, the "Kojiki" and the "Nihonshoki", it is recorded that the Emperor Jinmu (神武天皇) began to reign in the year 660 BCE and the date given for his ascension rites, 11th February is today set aside as a Japanese holiday called "National Foundation Day".

It is not clear where the Japanese people came from. However, it is generally agreed that the people of Japan are an Asian mongoloid race due to the presence of a specific blue mark known as the Mongolian spot at the base of the spine in infants. Recent research indicates that after the settlement of the ancestors of the present Japanese people, large numbers of people began to migrate to Japan from the Asian continent and Southeast Asia. Thus, their cultures were gradually adopted by the earlier settlers and consequently, today's Japanese are the result of this blending. It is commonly accepted that writing was first introduced into Japan around 400 CE.

The Japanese language has its own sentence structure, writing system that have little in common with other world languages. There is a widely accepted theory that Japanese belongs to the Altaic and Korean family of languages, however, it is yet not fully substantiated. There are three main types of writing called "kanji", "hiragana" and "katakana". Also, Roman letters are less frequently used. "Kanji" (Chinese characters) are ideograms that were brought from China where they are thought to have been in use since more than three thousand years ago. They developed from pictograms and signs, and there are said to be around fifty thousand characters in total. On the other hand, according to the traditional belief, the original Japanese phonetic "manyo-kana" characters were devised on the basis of two different readings (Chinese way and Japanese way) of "kanji", and subsequently simplified into the two different systems of "hiragana" and "katakana" around the ninth century. This was the widely accepted theory of the origins of the Japanese language until recently, when some began to connect the Japanese original language writing system and its sounds to ancient Hebrew as Joseph Eidelberg did. Today, we use a mixture of three types of characters and Roman letters. Sentences can be written either vertically and horizontally. When written vertically, the first line always starts on the right of the page and succeeding lines follow it to the left, as Hebrew letters are written from right to left.

Having introduced some facts about the Japanese language I would like to move on to Joseph Eidelberg's fascinating argument about the connection between the Japanese and the Hebrew languages. 'No one knows precisely who invented the *Katakana* and *Hiragana* syllabaries, or why the ancient Japanese had to invent two new scripts. It is generally agreed that the two so-called "native writings" are, in effect, simplifications of Chinese ideographs. However, the fact that such a large

proportion of the *Katakana* and *Hiragana* characters resembles the letters of the Hebrew alphabet is so amazing, that it is hard to accept their derivation from any other source, but Hebrew. And there are several clues hinting at the possibility that the ancient Japanese had been acquainted with Hebrew writing long before they decided to adopt the Chinese ideographs. But before presenting these clues, a few comments on the evolution of Hebrew writing will be helpful.

The ancient Hebrew letters belong to a group of North Semitic writings which, together with Phoenician and Aramaic, are considered to be among the earliest alphabetical writings. The old characters were used by the Hebrews from about 1000B.C.E. until the middle of the sixth century B.C.E.. Then the writing was gradually modernized, and around the first century B.C.E. it evolved into the so-called square writing which, excluding some insignificant changes, is used by the Hebrews up to the present day. In addition to the square script, which is used today only for writing the Torah on parchment, Hebrew has a cursive writing used for ordinary correspondence. Written from right to left, the Hebrew alphabet consists of twenty-two letters, all of them consonants. Instead of vowels, dots and dashes are used as vocalic punctuation marks...’ (quoted from ps. 26-27, in “*The Biblical Hebrew Origin Of The Japanese People*”). In order to examine the origin of the “katakana” and “hiragana” in connection with the Hebrew alphabet, Eidelberg presents some tables that show some stages in the evolution of the Hebrew writing and also the comparisons between Hebrew and Japanese characters, and he divides the compared characters into three groups. The first group of them consists of those almost identical Japanese characters with their Hebrew counterparts such as “コ(ko)” with “כ(k)”, “力(ka)” with “ק(q)”, “ノ(no)” with “נ(n)”, and “ハ(ha)” with “ה(h)”. The second group shows how the vocalic punctuation marks have been used by the Japanese in order to transform some Hebrew consonants into “katakana” and “hiragana” syllabic letters. For example, “ラ(ra)” and “ㇿ(r)”, and “ウ(u)” and “ㇿ(w)”. The third group contains some being turned sideways or some being written as though reflected in a mirror such as “ス(su)” and “ㇿ(ts)”, and “シ(shi)” and “ㇿ(sh)”.

Eidelberg continues, ‘Although the comparisons presented in the three groups should be sufficient to show that such a close similarity between so many Hebrew and Japanese characters could not be attributed to coincidence, we will, nevertheless, present additional evidence to show that the ancient Japanese had been acquainted with the Hebrew alphabet from the earliest times of their history. One of the mysteries of the *Katakana* and *Hiragana* is the origin of their names. It is customary to explain that “kata kana” means “one sided kana,” because it originated from “one side” of certain Chinese characters, and that “hira gana” (actually “hira kana”) means “simple kana.” However, neither explanation describes the *kana* writings properly: The *Katakana* does not always represent “side” sections of Chinese characters, and the *Hiragana* is not so “simple.” On the other hand, it is quite possible that “kata kana” is a single corruption of the Hebrew expression “ktav Kanaan,” meaning “writing of Canaan,” and “hira kana” is a slight corruption of the Hebrew-Aramaic expression “eira ktav Kanaan,” which was later shortened to “eira kana,” meaning “intertwined kana,” and that *Hiragana* is more “intertwined” than “simple” can be seen in the illustration below (Here Eidelberg inserts an example of ‘Twelfth century Hiragana writing’, which is written cursive style).

Indirect evidence of the possibility that the Japanese were in possession of writing at a time when they were still considered illiterate comes from the *Nihon-Shoki*. In book 16, we find that Emperor Muretsu (武烈天皇), who reigned at the beginning of the sixth century, “was fond of criminal law, and he was well versed in the statutes;” and as we know, both laws and statutes are usually kept in a written form. Another clue which points to the possibility that the ancient Japanese had been acquainted with the Hebrew writing comes from the mysterious importance that Japanese tradition attributes to the number 17. At this point, however, we must return for a moment to the discussion of the Hebrew alphabet.

According to an old Hebrew tradition, each of the twenty-two letters of the alphabet has a numerical value. And since, according to the same tradition, Hebrew letters are of divine origin, it follows that certain combinations of numbers possess prophetic significance. Thus, for instance, number 18 indicates “longevity,” because the numerical value of the two letters used to spell the Hebrew word *חי*, meaning “being alive,” is 18 (h=8; i=10). Similarly, number 17 portends “a good omen,” because the numerical value of the three letters of the Hebrew word *טוב*, meaning “good,” is 17 (t=9; o=6; v=2).

The Japanese also seem to have a tradition that number 17 should portend a kind of “good omen,” but they use this number in the composition of *haiku* poems only. According to the rules of Japanese prosody, a *haiku* poem should describe a scene of nature, a thought, or an emotion, in 17 syllables. The reason for this peculiar tradition is lost in antiquity, but the repeated use of “seventeen articles” in ancient constitutions (referring to “The Constitution of Seventeen Articles (憲法十七条)” by Prince Umayado (厩戸皇子), better known as “Shotoku Taishi (聖徳太子)”) indicates that it was not coincidental. Hence, it is reasonable to assume that there was a time when the Japanese knew of the particular significance of number 17, and that time might have been when they used the Hebrew alphabet.

If my assumption that the ancient Japanese were acquainted with the Hebrew alphabet is correct, the unavoidable question is why then did they have to adopt Chinese ideographic writing? I have mentioned that the ancient Hebrews considered their alphabet to be sacred, so it is quite possible that only priests were initiated into the sacred art of writing. Remember that according to the Bible, the cornerstone of Jewish law—the Ten Commandments—was written on two tablets of stone... These tablets were so venerated by the ancient Hebrews that they were kept in the most holy section of the Temple, into which the High Priest was allowed to enter only once a year. And according to Josephus Flavius, the Jewish historian who lived in the first century of our era, the Ten Commandments written on the tablets were considered so sacred that even priests were not allowed to quote them... It is quite possible that during all those years that the Japanese were considered illiterate, the Shinto priests knew of the existence of Hebrew writing, but guarded it as a divine treasure. However, when they eventually realised that one reason why Buddhism managed to establish itself in the country was the introduction of Chinese script, they decided to reveal the Hebrew writing, and adopt it for secular use. This assumption is incapable of proof either way. But judging by a somewhat similar story related in the Bible, such an event could really have happened.

During the reign of the Hebrew King Josiah, an ancient book of the law was accidentally discovered in the Temple, hidden there for three hundred and fifty years. Neither the king nor the High priest knew of the existence of the book, and it was only after reading it that the king learned about the feast of Passover, which had not been celebrated for over five hundred years. It is quite possible that something similar to the finding of the ancient Hebrew book in the Temple of Jerusalem took place in Japan during the Nara and the Heian periods. A discovery of some ancient documents, perhaps a copy of the Hebrew Scriptures, may have inspired a feeling of national pride, resulting in an urge to return to ancient traditions. Consequently, the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon-Shoki* had been written with an intent on emphasizing the divine origin of the Japanese Imperial Dynasty, while the Hebrew alphabet was introduced in order to compete with the Chinese writing’ (quoted from ps.28-32. Chinese characters and notes added).

It is quite interesting to take notice of number 17 as “a good omen” according to the numerical value of the Hebrew letters because the Scripture testifies the fact that on the very date of 17th of the first Jewish religious calendar month (or the seventh civic calendar month), “Nisan”, the ark of cypress wood came to rest on the mountains of Ararat, which wonderfully marked a new beginning of the newly appeared land after the global flood. It was also on 17th of Nisan that Jesus Christ resurrected from the dead as the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. Furthermore, it is also said that it was on the same day that the Israelites walked across the Red Sea to start a new beginning to free people after the Exodus from Egypt. All these symbolised were indeed a good omen.