

The Byzantine Christ

Introduction

The word “Byzantine” has many definitions. It is often used as a historical term in reference to the Byzantine Empire, which was the direct continuation of the Roman Empire during Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, centered on the capital of Constantinople.

The word itself also has a cultural context. Byzantine culture is characterized by conservative beliefs, hospitality, religious action and ideology, zeal, and family orientation, just to name a few.

This book will cover the culture of the Byzantine era as it applies to Biblical scripture in order to help the reader understand the Middle Eastern backdrop its verses were written in.

The Bible continues to be the blessed word of God to the masses yet it has also been a stumbling block to some. The purpose of this book is to answer the many criticisms that attack the authenticity of the Bible in regards to the validity of its authors.

Theologians, historians, archeologists and scientists, among others, continue to search the pages of the Bible for life answers. Many accept the Bible as the word of God, having the ultimate authority, while others make allegations over the linguistic and theological alterations of the Bible and believe there are contradictions within its pages.

I will attempt to address the alleged contradictions with consideration of the original culture and the original language of the Bible in hopes of bringing clarification and illumination.

Over the course of the past 3,000 years, the Aramaic language has been used by many nations. Jesus used it quite a bit.

“Aramaic (Classical Syriac: *Aramaya*) is a family of languages or dialects, belonging to the Semitic family. More specifically, it is a part of the Northwest Semitic subfamily, which also includes Canaanite languages such as Hebrew and Phoenician. The Aramaic script was widely adopted for other languages and is ancestral to both the Arabic and modern Hebrew alphabets.”

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aramaic_language

Most scholars accept the idea that Aramaic is the source of many of the Semitic languages. In this book, the word “Semitic languages” will be used to point to the old scripture – which is said to have been written in Aramaic, Hebrew or formal Arabic languages. (Semitic languages include, but are not limited to: Aramaic, Chaldean, Assyrian, Hebrew and Arabic.)

“The 2004 film *The Passion of the Christ* used Aramaic for much of its dialogue, specially reconstructed by a scholar, William Fulco, S.J. Where the appropriate words (in

1st century Aramaic) were no longer known, he used the Aramaic of Daniel, 4th-century Syriac and Hebrew as the basis for his work.”

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aramaic_language

Jesus spoke many Aramaic words in the New Testament as found in almost all Bible translation and the regarding the Old Testament, or the *Tanakh*, Aramaic words are used extensively. In particular, sections of the book of Daniel were recorded in Aramaic.

The *Tanakh* is the Hebrew reference for the Old Testament and I will be using the word *Tanakh* throughout the book to reference such.

Some of our Jewish brothers and sisters are not comfortable with the term "Old Testament," as they see the Hebrew Scriptures as their still-fresh covenant with Yahweh. Out of respect for their feelings, I will use the word "*Tanakh*," (sometimes spelled out Tenak or Tanach) or "*Mikra*" which refers to the canon of the Hebrew Bible, often referred to as the "Old Testament." ("Testament" means "Covenant.")

I will be referring to the Semitic languages to discuss an area of conflict in order to clarify it. Semitic languages such as Aramaic and Arabic are both root system languages. The root system is one in which the language possesses a particular set of root letters or consonants from which the rest of the word derive.

Studying the Bible in its Semitic language original format will gives us insight as to the ideological root words of the Biblical text.

I will be using four Bible translations to reference this study. King James and New King James versions are the main English translations I use in this study. Also, the Arabic translation of the 1878 Van Dyck Bible and an Aramaic copy of the *Tanakh* and the New Testament will also be used. I found the Aramaic Bible in the Middle East while I was living there years ago and it is now out of print.

While many Protestant Evangelicals have rejected everything having to do with ancient Christian history beginning with the first century, we must acknowledge its authenticity and value. It is not to be accepted as final authority but to clarify some areas that are difficult to understand.

The Protestant Church worldwide has unfortunately accepted the Bible teaching after the Reformation, with no regard for the ancient Christian history of the Middle East, where the Bible was birthed. They are faced with criticism by the Eastern Church, of their faith, doctrine, teaching and the fact that the language translations are based on Post-Reformation language (1517 – 1648).

This means that 1,500 years remain unacknowledged by the Western Church. We might find, in the pages of the Eastern manuscripts, some unbiblical principles. However, we should not “throw the baby out with the bathwater” and ignore the entire script and its

historical context. This is only to our detriment and limits our overall understanding of the Biblical texts.

While in Jerusalem, I met a German lady who claimed to be an atheist, but in Jerusalem, had found Yahweh, or Jesus. She asked me, “Why has the Western Church taken me to Rome while everything started *here* in Jerusalem?”

The fact that we, the Protestant Church, have some issues with the doctrine of the Eastern Church, does not permit us to throw away 1,500 years of its foundational manuscript and culture.

One of the main problems with which we struggle is the fact that with the Islamic conquest of Palestine in the beginning of 600 A.D. has changed the names of places and altered the region’s map.

A student of the Bible may think that a place mentioned in the Bible no longer exists and he or she might think there is a contradiction in the Bible’s stories. I advise my reader to keep up with modern archeologists who continue to excavate many of the biblical lands. Especially today, with new technology, excavators do not need to do a physical digging, but use cameras with laser technology to find their way under the ground, over and over proving the Bible as true in its history and heart.

I would also like to point out that some of the old Bible commentaries and references, if they have not yet been, need to be updated with this current information that has been uncovered through today’s archeologists and scientists.

We also need to replace some books in our personal study with currently published information.

For example, Ezekiel 38 and 39 speaks of Gog and Magog, and because some of the names in the book differ from those we have today, some believe this prophesy is inaccurate. Others have interpreted the word “Rosh” as Russia, which of course did not exist at the time of this prophesy. “Rosh” is actually a Hebrew and Aramaic word meaning “head or leader.”

Let’s look at Isaiah 9:6 for a simple mistranslation where Jesus is referred to as the “Prince of Peace” instead of the “Head (or Source) of Peace” as it should read, according to the original Semitic language it was written in.

Isaiah 9:6

*For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called
Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,*

Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Now the word “Prince” in the Semitic languages comes from the root word “Amara.” An “Amara” or an “Amir” is the person who acts on an order from the king, fulfilling a special assignment, one who is second in command. But according to the original Semitic languages, this scripture actually reads that Jesus is the “Head of Peace,” a totally different meaning all together. You see, “Head” in the Semitic languages means the principle one, the source, the President, the CEO, the one in command where “Prince” in the same original Semitic languages suggests one *second* in command, simply fulfilling an order from a higher-up.

Do you see the difference? It may be ever so slight, but it construes the meaning just enough to throw off the essence, meaning and flavor of the original word of God according to the text of the original Semitic languages.

It is also worth noting that many of today’s Eastern Protestants inquire whether or not the Protestant teachings are Biblically based or were simply carried over from many of the Western Pilgrimages when the West sent missionaries to the East, bringing with them their own ideas and flavor of the gospel without regard to the already established culture and languages of the people they were visiting.

The fact that some of these Western missionaries went to the mission field without knowledge of the language and the culture, does not mean that they were altogether wrong in the way they presented the Bible. Some might have imposed their culture over another culture, but at the end of the day they meant well; after all, they did build hospitals, schools, orphanages, Bible schools and they planted churches.

The questions arising though, have to do with Paul’s teaching on a woman’s head covering, spiritual covering, marriage, divorce and the Bible’s stance on slavery, just to name a few and some have used these questions as an excuse to reject the entire gospel completely.

So, in giving honor to whom honor is due, I would like to say these Western missionaries did a good job in their efforts but left confusion in their wake by not having a full understanding of the culture, language and heritage in which they were immersing themselves in.

This is just one of the reasons this book is being written. To clarify any questions about the validity of the original Gospel and bring honor to the culture and land of origin it was birthed in.

I am in no way a scholar who claims to have all the answers. But I will attempt to discuss the cultural perspective of the Bible with my ethnic background and understanding of the Jewish Middle Eastern culture (which, by the way, has not evolved very much over the centuries) and some of the languages of the Bible.

I am not compromising my faith. I seek to be honest in highlighting some textual problems and conflicts.

There is no question in my mind that the Bible is the inspired word of God.

I will exegete the scriptures in question, but let me assure you that at the end of each chapter, we will see that God is, in fact, the Author of His word who stands by His promises that are infallible.

The unchanging truth of the matter is that we are human, and many times we do not fully know or understand the culture or the language the original Biblical text was written in. And God is not angry at our raising scriptural concerns.

I know that some of the exegesis might upset or offend some, and cause various readers to question my linguistic, biblical, cultural and historical knowledge.

Please be patient as you read, and seek God's wisdom, revelation and discernment.

My dear friend, I would like to assure you that I am a Christian, an advocate of the Bible, and one who acknowledges that the scripture is the inspired word of God as it says in 2 Timothy 3:16.

2 Timothy 3:16

¹⁶ All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,

I pray you find comfort in the pages of this book and security knowing that your Bible is sound in its teaching and that God is the perfect Author of His perfect word.

I also hope that this teaching will open your heart to areas where the Holy Spirit wants us to grow in the knowledge of the Father God and His Son, Jesus Christ.