

Dealing with the Textual Challenges of the Bible

By Dr. Victor Khalil

The Bible was birthed within the Semitic language and culture, and thus any verses that seem problematic to some critics, leading them to conclude that there are contradictions in the Bible, are related to cultural and linguistic misunderstandings.

Here are three main areas, with examples, to help us to keep this context in mind as we study the Bible. and give some examples as we cover them.

Numbers, Time, Calendar and Name Changes

1. Numbers:

⁴ David took from him one thousand *chariots*, seven hundred horsemen, and twenty thousand foot soldiers. Also David hamstrung all the chariot *horses*, except that he spared *enough* of them for one hundred chariots. (2 Samuel 8:4)

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This looks as if there are contradictions in the numbers: seven hundred horsemen versus seven thousand horsemen.

The word “horseman” in many of the Semitic languages can refer to one man riding on a horse and/or a unit of horsemen driving a chariot; horseman is the leader of the chariot, as we see in many pictures of the Egyptian and Syrian armies. In Arabic, the word for a military “General” can mean both the rank of one man, and the battalion/division/troop under him.

2. Times/Calendar:

Lunar versus Solar Calendar: The Egyptians and Romans used what we call the Solar/Sun calendar, also known as the Gregorian calendar; however, the Jewish calendar, Arabic calendar, Coptic calendar and Muslim calendars follow what is called the Lunar (moon) calendar, which changes from year to year, unlike the consistence of the Solar calendar.

In the Lunar calendar, twilight is also called “between the two evenings” and/or “the two suppers.”

⁵ And they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month, at twilight, the evening(s). (Leviticus 23:5)

Middle Eastern Jews and Arabs have two evenings, two mornings, two noontimes, etc. Time, in the Lunar calendar, is set by the prayer times, therefore they differ between religious groups and the seasons.

Jesus was in two evenings in two different places.

¹⁵ When it was evening, His disciples came to Him, saying, “This is a deserted place, and the hour is already late. Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food.”

²³ “Now when evening came, He was alone there. ²⁴ But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. (Matthew 14:15, 23, 24)

Connecting.

Connections, such as “then,” “while,” “afterwards,” etc. do not have a time-frame unless it says “and immediately,” and here is an example of that:

⁴ Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, “I have acquired a man from the Lord.” ² Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. (Genesis 4:1-2)

3. Name changes:

If you ask a Jew in Israel “Where is the West Bank?” immediately you will be answered, “There is no such place here... Oh, you mean Samaria.”

And like wise if you ask an Arab “Where is Samaria?” you get this answer, “There is no such place, unless you mean The West Bank.”

With the invasion of Islam, and many wars, names have changed and border lines between countries have changed, too, Muslims changed many names of towns, cities, and people in Israel into Arabic names. By the way, most of the Arabic maps do not have the name “Israel” on them, but rather, they say, “Palestine.”

For this reason, allegations were made that the “Tanakh” (The Old Testament) got the history wrong.

Rest assured my dear friends the Bible is the infallible unerring word of God.

1 Peter:1:9-21

⁹ And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; ²⁰ knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, ²¹ for prophecy never came by the will of man, but ^h holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit.