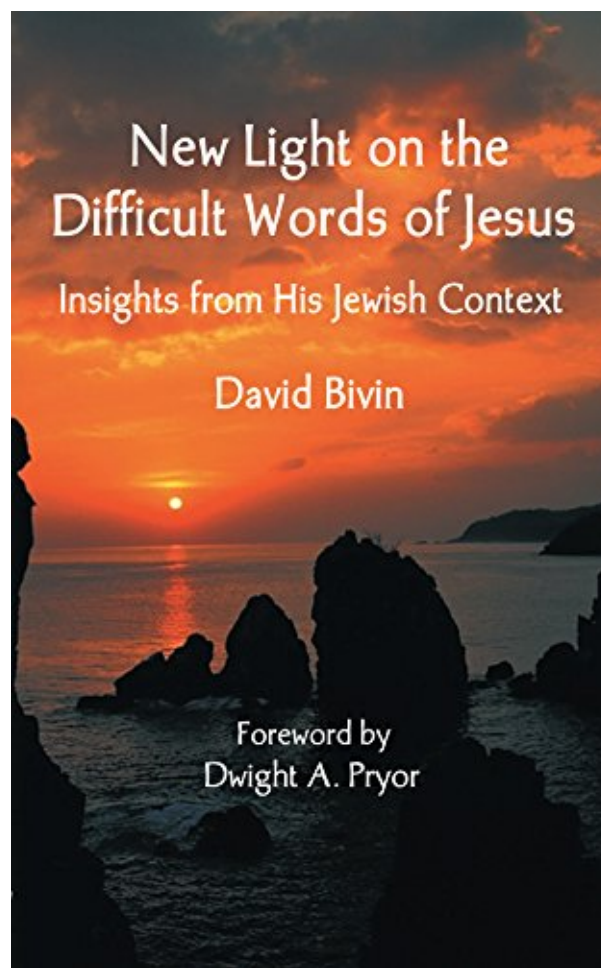
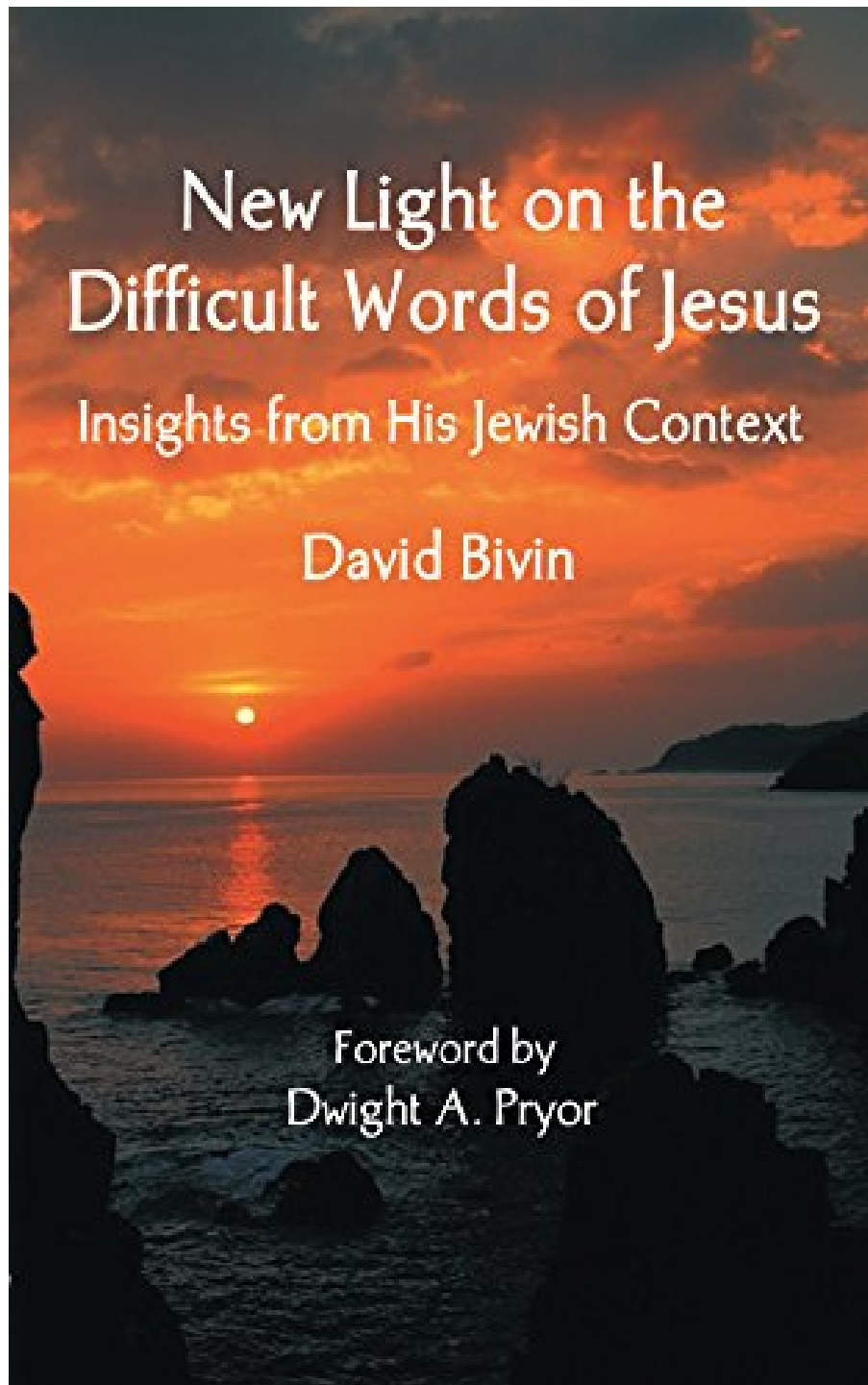


**NEW LIGHT ON THE DIFFICULT WORDS
OF JESUS: INSIGHTS FROM HIS JEWISH
CONTEXT BY DAVID BIVIN, LOIS
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New Light on the Difficult Words of Jesus

Insights from His Jewish Context

David Bivin

Foreword by
Dwight A. Pryor

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In Jerusalem, David Bivin has interacted for decades with some of the best Jewish scholarship in the world. This book displays many of the brilliant Hebraic gems the author has mined that help illuminate the pages of the Gospels. Clearly written and very readable, Bivin shows why Christians need rabbinic sources if they intend to know and understand Jesus in his first-century Jewish setting. **New Light** is a valuable resource for every serious student of Scripture. --Dr. Marvin Wilson, Author, *Our Father Abraham*

Bivin's insights into the life and times of Messiah are nuggets mined from a lifetime of labor, with scholarly skill and faithful determination. Reading **New Light** will increase your love and respect for Jesus, and summon your heart to walk after him in paths of discipleship. --Dwight A. Pryor, President, *JC Studies Center*

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Many readers of Bivin's popular first book, "Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus" have waited expectantly for years for more from this author. They will not be disappointed - this carefully researched book gives readers a many insights on Jesus' Jewishness that cast light on his career and ministry. While very readable for the layperson, the book includes scholarly discussion and sources in chapter endnotes for higher level study.

Though the title sounds similar to Bivin's book from twenty years ago, it is actually very different in content, focusing on Jesus as a Jewish Rabbi rather than on language issues. Readers will also find that years of scholarship have matured Bivin's research and refined his conclusions.

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In this stimulating collection of writings, David Bivin will be your personal tour guide through the multi-hued Jewish landscape that frames the words of our Lord. His words will grow in clarity and depth when seen in the light of their original setting.

Very readable, but includes scholarly footnotes that make the book a valuable help to those who want to study in more depth.

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Most helpful customer reviews

77 of 79 people found the following review helpful.

Jewish Background Helps Open Up the Gospels

By Edward J. Vasicek

The volume is subtitled, "Insights from His [Jesus] Jewish Context," and it lives up to its subtitle. Plenty of stimulating insights here.

David Bevin has collected and revised 22 articles he wrote for a "Jewish Roots" journal, The Jerusalem Perspective, and compiled them into a most interesting book.

The book is subdivided into four main heading, the first of which is "A Jewish Rabbi Name Jesus." This section includes articles about Jesus' formal education, the common practice of discipleship in first century Judaism, and the accuracy of Oral Tradition.

The second section is titled, "Jesus' First Century Jewish Context" and includes information about hems, tassels, Jewish prayers, and examples of rabbis who remained single until later in life.

The third section is titled, "New Light on Jesus' Teachings" and address Jesus' view of riches, pacifism, and divorce.

The fourth section is titled, "The Kingdom is Here" and addresses Jesus as the Messiah-Prophet, the requirements for gentile believers (Acts 15), and Paul's Olive Tree Analogy.

The positives of this book far outweigh the negatives. Just reading relevant portions from the Talmud, for example, amplifies many Biblical passages. The information about discipleship was especially enlightening. I never realized that there were several hundred other rabbis roaming throughout Israel with bands of disciples during the time of Christ. The Talmudic ruling that a man who was going to follow a rabbi for more than 30 days needed permission from his wife evidences how common discipleship was during that era.

The author frequently suggests that while many of Jesus' practices were main stream for that time, others - such as claiming to be Messiah and working miracle after miracle - were not!

The chapter about why Jesus did not get married is particularly relevant in the light of the popularity of the fictional "Da Vinci Code." The examples of famous rabbis who married later in life are helpful (even if a footnote suggests some assume Jesus was married because of the Bible's silence; such a viewpoint ignores the issue of offspring fathered by a man without a sin nature).

I do have some reservations with this material, however. Whereas many Christians have divorced Jesus from His Jewish context and present all of Jesus' teachings as original, this book (and some others) present too many of Jesus' teaching as not original at all. If one is determined to align all but a few of Jesus' teachings with those of the rabbis, an artificial template inhibits the true interpretation of Jesus' words. You make it fit

because you think it is supposed to fit -- whether it really fits or not. The author also does not seem to give much credence to the Gospel of John (as though it has no bearing on the synoptics).

Another example of where I disagree includes the author's belief that Jesus viewed the "heavy" and "light" commandments as bearing equal weight. Then what about Jesus' criticism toward those who strained at gnats and swallowed camels? If camels and gnats are the same thing, how is this possible? Or specks and logs?

The same might be said for Jesus' view toward the Oral Torah (rabbinic traditions). Although He did frequently follow much of the Oral Torah, He spoke against being obsessed with the traditions of men in contrast to the Word of God (and by the "Word of God" He meant the written Word, which He often quoted as such).

Although I do admit it is hermeneutically helpful to try to back-translate Jesus' words from Greek to Hebrew, those of us who believe in both inspiration and inerrancy might have trouble with some of the author's views regarding the composition of the Gospels. The author does not hold a low view of Scripture, just not as high a view as we who espouse verbal, plenary inspiration and inerrancy.

This is a short but worthwhile read. Most of the chapters run only 4 or 5 pages of text plus heavy (but sometimes interesting) footnotes. Because the information is so illuminating, 4 or 5 pages a chapter is satisfying.

This book contains a wealth of gems, despite a few stones among the jewels. With those cautions, I highly recommend this work to anyone who wants to seriously and diligently study the words and works of Jesus Christ. Great for pastors, professors, Bible teachers, but only selected laymen (at least for we who are conservative evangelicals or fundamentalists). The source materials here are especially helpful even if readers draw different conclusions than Bivin does. This is the sort of material I LOVE!

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Very valuable insight

By LEWard

Yes, Jesus words must be understood in the context of His time, not perceptions as they have evolved now 2000 year later. My only reservation is that I wonder if Mr. Bivin is trying too hard to fit Jesus into the perspectives of His contemporaries. For instance, there is controversy over the original text of Matthew 19:17. Mr. Bivin uses this to connect "one good" with the Torah rather than with God. However, there is no similar controversy over the text of Luke 18:18 which clearly indicates God is the One good. Also earlier in Matthew 19 Jesus clearly labels Moses instruction on divorce as unacceptable. Of course that is part of Torah. It was unacceptable because it broke one of the Ten Commandments. Jesus generally upheld Torah, but not always.

122 of 124 people found the following review helpful.

Solid survey that illuminates some of Jesus's more "confusing" comments

By Amazon Customer

This is one of those books you wish you had read a long time ago. David Bivin does an excellent job of "taking you there," back to the time of what it would be like to hear the words of Yeshua (Jesus) back in the second temple period. Bivin makes frequent use of rabbinical sources to help explain some of the more challenging aspects of the life of Yeshua. Although the text is nothing new per se, it draws from a vast pool of knowledge of great scholars such as David Flusser and Brad Young who make extensive use of ancient Jewish writings to shed light and provide context to the New Testament. For anyone not familiar with Jewish sources, Bivin is not suggesting that the Talmud is inspired as the Scripture, but that it contains important clues and commentary that shows that Yeshua was very familiar with these texts. Many of Yeshua's words

parallel those in the Talmud, as Bivin shows.

Bivin does a good job of explaining Jewish customs that affect our understanding of Yeshua. The opening chapters on discipleship, the life of a rabbi, and taking on a teacher's "yoke" are required reading for anyone who seeks a solid historical analysis of the background to the gospels. The section on the prayers of Yeshua is also very critical, but too short; you will definitely want to research this further after reading it. And the analysis on the famous Acts 15 passage is also quite insightful (although again not necessarily new, but quite clear and concise).

In all each section is pretty brief, easy to read, and answers a basic question such as "Why didn't Yeshua marry," or addresses a confusing point such as "Miracle on the Sea of Galilee." In fact, each chapter is basically a summary of articles that you can find on his website, entitled "Jerusalem Perspective."

David Bivin previously wrote a book, "Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus." Although I kind of liked that book, I was very disappointed with it because Bivin didn't make the case for the Hebrew gospels (i.e., written in Hebrew) that well and the use of Jewish idioms didn't really help explain some of Jesus's difficult words. The selected verses weren't that impressive. This time around however, Bivin's choice of difficult words was impressive. This time he really picked some tough ones (such as divorce, pacifism, the rich young ruler) that often frustrate Christian commentators. Although he doesn't advance the case for the Hebrew gospels per se, you will feel that at the very least the gospel writers thought in Hebrew because so many things fit well when viewed Hebraically.

In all, this is a very useful book that I think Messianic believers will find fruitful. It would be helpful for those new to the Jewish background of the gospels. For those who have been around, I think you might find some of the references and the arguments pretty helpful, even if you already agree with the positions. Assuredly a great read for anyone who seeks better background knowledge to the gospels, and ultimately to get to know their Messiah a little better.

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