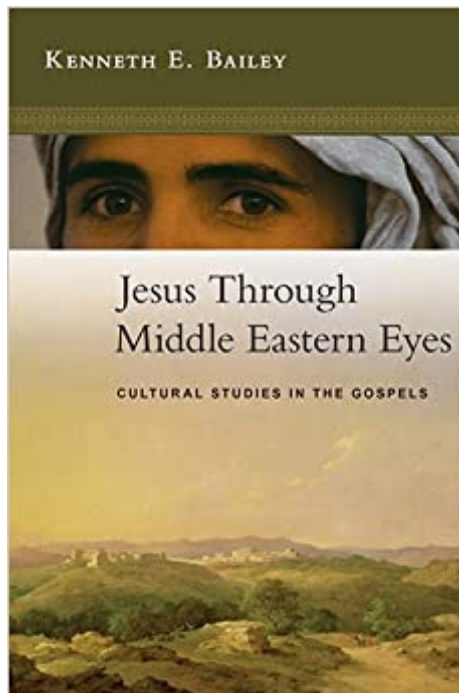


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# Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies In The Gospels



## Synopsis

Beginning with Jesus' birth, Ken Bailey leads you on a kaleidoscopic study of Jesus throughout the four Gospels. Bailey examines the life and ministry of Jesus with attention to the Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes, Jesus' relationship to women, and especially Jesus' parables. Through it all, Bailey employs his trademark expertise as a master of Middle Eastern culture to lead you into a deeper understanding of the person and significance of Jesus within his own cultural context. With a sure but gentle hand, Bailey lifts away the obscuring layers of modern Western interpretation to reveal Jesus in the light of his actual historical and cultural setting. This entirely new material from the pen of Ken Bailey is a must-have for any student of the New Testament. If you have benefited from Bailey's work over the years, this book will be a welcome and indispensable addition to your library. If you are unfamiliar with Bailey's work, this book will introduce you to a very old yet entirely new way of understanding Jesus.

## Book Information

Paperback: 443 pages

Publisher: IVP Academic (February 22, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0830825681

ISBN-13: 978-0830825684

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1.3 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.5 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars 296 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #22,762 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #5 in [Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Bible Study & Reference > New Testament > Biography](#) #11 in [Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Bible Study & Reference > History & Culture](#) #12 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Middle East](#)

## Customer Reviews

"A brilliant addition to Bailey's other works in which he sheds light on the biblical text from Middle Eastern culture." (Roy B. Zuck, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, October-December 2010)"The work will yield a rich harvest of information, pastoral support, and insight for all who read it." (Susan K. Hedahl, *Currents in Theology & Mission*, February 2010)"Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes is Bailey's most recent 400 page call to western Christians who need to time travel to the Middle East. And in page after page, he identifies themes and reflexes assumed in the gospels that slip right past us."

(Gary M. Burge, *Evangelical Quarterly*, July 2009)"With a life-time of living, observing and teaching in the Middle East, Kenneth Bailey's insights as a commentator are invaluable, showing time after time, how an understanding of the cultural features of the background of the Gospels can bring alive the meaning of the text, and more importantly, the power and significance of Jesus and his message." (David Parker, *Evangelical Review of Theology*, July 2009)"Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes is quite readable, with a minimum of technical language. Wherever Bailey references a rhetorical term, he gives it careful definition, bringing along the novice in the field. He draws upon the works of others, ancient and modern, allowing students of scripture to gain an additional layer of insight from the texts he examines. While one could enjoy reading the book straight through, it has the wealth of information that may also be accessed through use as a resource for examining any of the treated Gospel texts." (John David Bowman, *Brethren Life & Thought*, Winter & Spring 2009)"This book could serve as material for an adult or student Sunday School class. Laid out in simple format for easy absorption by readers, the author's explanations of his findings require no formal training to follow and understand them. Particularly helpful are the summaries provided at the conclusion of each chapter. This book may very well establish Bailey's legacy beyond dispute." (Gene R. Smillie, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, June 2009)"Bailey has a gift of clear, lively expression; he takes advantage of his personal experiences, interest in Hebrew poetic structure, and knowledge of Arabic to bring insights into NT interpretation." (Ruth B. Edwards, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 31.5, 2009)"A rich and fascinating anthology of exegetical essays reflecting on gospel texts through the lens of Middle Eastern culture and rhetoric. Bailey's exegetical discussions offer a treasure trove of cultural insights into the Jesus traditions of the Gospels. His essays highlight such issues as nationalism, violence, political oppression, inter-ethnic conflict, and joblessness. Bailey's christological insights are power and poignant." (Dorothy Jean Weaver, *Interpretation*, July 2009)"Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes is Bailey's most recent call to Western Christians who need to time-travel to the Middle East. On page after page, he identifies themes and reflexes assumed in the gospels that slip right past us. Stories like the Parable of the Woman and the Judge are given interpretations that should contribute to every commentary writer. And fourteen more parables are made alive again, each in its original context." (Gary M. Burge, *Books & Culture*, March/April 2009)"The great strength of this work is the author's familiarity with Middle Eastern culture. He succeeds in shedding new light on well known Gospel stories from a cultural perspective. Another valuable contribution of this book is the introduction to, and interaction with, great Eastern commentaries long forgotten or largely unknown to Western Biblical Scholarship. A very readable book and will be profitable to various levels of

readers. Anyone interested in understanding the New Testament from its own distinctive Middle Eastern cultural perspective ought to read this book." (Mark Jason, Themelios, 33, no. 3)"Like getting a Master's degree in the New Testament without paying for it. Like wowing your blog readers with little known facts but not taking the credit for it. Like being the smartest kid in class--well, you get the point. Kenneth Bailey's book is all of that, and even more incredibly impressive." (Worship Leader, December 2008)"Bailey's important contribution is refreshing and guile-less; authoritative without being authoritarian; theologically sound without having to sound like a theologian. An engaging and compelling read." (Bob Gerow, Pulpit Helps, December 2008)"On every page Bailey utilizes his expertise as an authority of ancient Middle Eastern culture to guide the reader into a deeper understanding of the person and significance of Jesus within his own cultural context. With astonishingly keen insight and learned expertise Bailey peels back the obscuring layers our modern Western interpretation of scripture [has] added to the Bible to reveal Jesus in the light of his actual historical and ethnic setting." (Jim Miller Book Review, August 27, 2008)"Bailey shares insights from Syrian and Arabic Christian thought about Jesus that are almost unknown to the rest of the world. He has the gift of communicating interesting ideas in a devotional way that church members who love God's Word will appreciate." (L. R. K., Church Libraries Journal, Summer 2008)"[T]here is no comparable New Testament scholar who is a native speaker of English and yet who has grown up, lived and taught in the Middle East and been fluent in Arabic. Bailey provides a genuinely unique perspective." (James F. McGrath, [www.exploringourmatrix.blogspot.com](http://www.exploringourmatrix.blogspot.com), June 20, 2008)"A wonderful resource in studying the life of Jesus within the life setting in which He lived. This is a powerful tool to give fresh insights as you preach and teach the life of Jesus." (ForeWord, February 20, 2008)"I found myself fascinated as I read of the cultural and historical background behind familiar gospel stories and parables. Bailey's background information, rhetorical analysis, and commentary will provide valuable perspective on often-puzzling passages." (C. W. for Discipleship Journal, March/April 2008)"Bailey attempts to bring his extensive background in history to the table to deepen his readers' understanding of the Gospels through understanding culture." (Pulpit Helps, February 2008)"Learning to read Scripture through other people's cultural spectacles, as well as our own, always brings huge enrichment. Kenneth Bailey has done a fantastic job in enabling us to put on the spectacles of a Middle Eastern believer and to therefore gain new insights into what was always there in Scripture but not quite so clear when only viewed through our lenses." (Mary J. Evans, vice-principal emeritus, London School of Theology)"Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes is intended, explains its author, 'to contribute new perspectives from the Eastern tradition which have rarely, if ever, been considered outside the Arabic-speaking Christian world.' Strictly speaking, of

course, Kenneth Bailey does not offer new perspectives, but ideas frequently as old as the earliest church and as the ancient church fathers, that may well be new to many of his Western readership. Here is an imaginative, humorous reading of key Gospel passages, an engaged and engaging set of studies that emphasize the concrete world presupposed in the New Testament. Bailey is informed not only by faithful contemporary scholarship, but also by the great exegetes of the past, and shows his humility by offering alternative explanations of passages where these may be of help to the reader. His writing and argument are cogent to the ordinary reader, tackling problems for the contemporary church, without allowing twenty-first-century debates to dictate the scope of his discussion." (Edith M. Humphrey, William F. Orr Professor of New Testament, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary)"Kenneth Bailey, a master storyteller and expert observer of Middle Eastern culture, applies his sixty years of experience living in this region to produce a groundbreaking work on Jesus' world. Bailey animates the Jewish cultural world of first-century Roman Palestine through clever, often humorous personal vignettes and observations of current Middle Eastern culture. The blurry outlines of enigmatic biblical characters such as King Herod or Zacchaeus take clearer shape, and unnamed women such as the Syro-Phoenician mother or the adulterous woman are painted with colorful, culturally sensitive strokes. Bailey offers a feast for the mind and heart in his brilliant discussion of the Lord's Prayer and Jesus' parables; each chapter has plenty to savor. Throughout, Bailey connects theological and christological significance to his cultural insights, producing an original, engaging study. Bailey's passion for the biblical story coupled with his conversational prose render *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes* a captivating read for scholars, pastors and laypeople alike." (Lynn Cohick, associate professor of New Testament, Wheaton College)"Kenneth Bailey's *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes* is rich with interpretive and cultural insight. He sheds light on what is so often missed in most commentaries and books about Jesus written from a Western perspective. Indeed, Bailey's book provides the much-needed corrective to the dubious results of the Jesus Seminar, whose distorted Jesus is a product of Greco-Roman culture and literature, instead of the Judaic culture and literature of Palestine. *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes* is easy to read--students and pastors will benefit from it tremendously--but there is also much for scholars." (Craig A. Evans, Payzant Distinguished Professor of New Testament, Acadia Divinity College, and author of *Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars Distort the Gospels*)"I have long been an admirer of Kenneth Bailey's helpful insights. As in his earlier works, his breadth of knowledge of Middle Eastern culture sheds rich light on numerous points in the Gospels, providing fresh perspectives and often illuminating details we have rarely considered. He provokes those of us who depend mostly on ancient written sources to consider new approaches,

often cohering with but often supplementing such research." (Craig Keener, professor of New Testament, Palmer Theological Seminary, and author of *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*) "Among the many New Testament scholars interpreting the Gospels today, few offer new and dramatic insights like Kenneth E. Bailey. From a childhood in Egypt to a career working within the Middle East, Bailey has established himself as the premier cultural interpreter of the life of Jesus. Using insights from cultural anthropology and skilled exegesis, suddenly the Gospels come alive as the Middle Eastern stories that they are. Long after other scholars' books are forgotten, Bailey's work on the Gospels will continue to be a timeless resource into the world of Jesus. This newest volume, written for the nonspecialist, is a splendid place to begin. *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes* is guaranteed to become a favorite on many Christians' bookshelves." (Gary M. Burge, professor of New Testament, Wheaton College & Graduate School) "While no book on Jesus and the Gospels can be perfect or final, writing any really good book on them places staggering demands on an interpreter. To name just seven: literary aptitude, linguistic competence, critical shrewdness, cultural sagacity, theological acumen, spiritual sensitivity and hermeneutical sophistication. In this highly stimulating study Kenneth Bailey manages to reflect them all, and more besides, in part because he stands on the shoulders of Middle Eastern interpreters whom few in the West can even read. This book will sharpen historical understanding, improve much preaching and fuel new scholarship. It may shed as much new *Licht vom Osten* ('light from the ancient East') on Gospel passages as we have seen since Deissmann's book by that title a century ago. And in all of this, Bailey keeps the cross and the message of his sources at the center where they belong." (Robert W. Yarbrough, associate professor and New Testament department chair, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School)

Kenneth E. Bailey (1930–2016) was an acclaimed author and lecturer in Middle Eastern New Testament studies. An ordained Presbyterian minister, he served as Canon Theologian of the Anglican Diocese of Pittsburgh. The author of more than 150 articles in English and in Arabic, his writings include *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, *The Good Shepherd*, *Open Hearts in Bethlehem: A Christmas Drama*, and *The Cross and the Prodigal*. Bailey spent forty years living and teaching in seminaries and institutes in Egypt, Lebanon, Jerusalem and Cyprus. For twenty of those years he was professor of New Testament and head of the Biblical Department of the Near East School of Theology in Beirut where he also founded and directed the Institute for Middle Eastern New Testament Studies. Bailey was also on the faculty of The Ecumenical Institute for Theological Research in Jerusalem. Traveling around the globe to lecture and teach, Bailey spoke in theological

colleges and seminaries in England (Oxford, Cambridge, Bristol) Ireland, Canada, Egypt, Finland, Latvia, Denmark, New Zealand, Australia, and Jerusalem. He was active as a Bible teacher for conferences and continuing education events in the Middle East, Europe, and North America, and he taught at Columbia, Princeton, and Fuller Seminary.

*Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, is another piece of literature one must read to come closer to a literal understanding of scripture. Through the years, people have told me to read scripture daily and let the "spirit" guide me. With the myriad of interpretations out there, how are we to know which truth we are being led to? I have found a few authors that seem to have captured the "spirit" of scripture's message. This is being accomplished through the eyes of the original authors. So many contemporary writers give a post-enlightenment flavor to scripture. How can it be otherwise? Dr Bailey is one of those authors that understands that to glean scripture for everything its worth, cultural context is important. This keeps our understanding of this literature close to its original intent, without infusing western cultural influence in to that translation. It is this western, materialistic influence that subverts the translation and dilutes the richness of scripture. Dr Bailey's analysis of scripture allows his readers to experience more of that richness and better understand where proper emphasis is placed in these literary works. Instead of having a "nice story" impression, one comes out of scripture with a "wow, I never thought of that" response. To my mind, this is what scripture should be doing for its readers. This book is a must and I highly recommend it.

The undeniable strengths of this book have been described well by other reviewers. I would like to describe a few weaknesses I've perceived in this otherwise very useful book:1) In his perceptive analysis of literary structures and cultural context, sometimes Bailey seems to under-analyze the wider literary context in which each parable/account is situated. This weakness appears twice, for example, in his commentary on the parables in Luke 16. First, in his consideration of the parable of the unjust steward, Bailey focuses on verses 1 to 8, emphasizing their connection with the previous chapter, but dismissing their connection with verses 9 to 13 by saying, "The verses that follow in Luke 16:9-13 display their own inner integrity and are best understood as a new paragraph" (pg. 334). This ignores the very clear connection between verses 4 and 9 (both speak of using money to win a welcome into future homes) which show that verses 9-13 are Jesus' commentary on the parable. This leads Bailey to underestimate the parable's concern with how we are to use money. Second, in his discussion of the story of the rich man and Lazarus, also in Luke 16, Bailey does a better job of allowing the context to shape his interpretation of the story, but still skips over the

(admittedly difficult) verses 16-18 with this brief comment: "The reasons for the presence of Lk 16:16-18 between the poem on mammon and the parable have thus far escaped me" (pg. 380, footnote).<sup>2</sup> It also seems to me that sometimes Bailey is a little over-eager to draw interpretive conclusions from cultural considerations. For example, in his discussion of the parable of the pounds (Lk 19:11-27), Bailey suggests that the nobleman's final command to bring "those enemies of mine [who had rejected his kingship]... and slay them before me" is "an opening statement, no more" (pg. 407). He finds such a judgment to be "critically damaging" (pg. 407) to Luke's portrayal of Jesus and Jesus' commands to love our enemies. Bailey provides cultural support for this interpretation by saying, "If a Westerner is told by his employer, 'You're fired! Clear out your desk! I want you off the property by 5 p.m. today!' the employee will understand that he or she is fired and start packing at once.... A traditional Middle Easterner will listen to the same speech and conclude: 'The master is clearly very upset! Hmm--I see that I have a long negotiating process ahead of me....'" (pgs. 406-407). This cultural context is fascinating and potentially useful, but appears to me to be misused in a way that underestimates the Bible's portrayal of Jesus as the final Judge and as the One who warned of a very real and final judgment to fall on Jerusalem for rejecting their Messiah. (See later in this very chapter, Luke 19:41-44; also Luke 13:1-9; 21:21-24.) At other times Bailey similarly offers fascinating cultural context that seems best taken as suggestive, not definitive, for interpretation.<sup>3</sup> A final (and less important) criticism of this book is that Bailey can at times feel slightly too repetitive when you read through the book from cover to cover. On the upside, this allows the reader to usefully dip into any chapter at random and still benefit from Bailey's commentary on a single passage. I have thoroughly enjoyed reading Bailey's keen insights into the stories and teachings of Jesus. I have been comparing Bailey's conclusions with those of Joel Green in his commentary on Luke's *The Gospel of Luke* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament) and find the comparison very useful. (Much of *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes* is based on Luke.) Bailey reveals much color and emotional impact in each account, and Green adds a more cautious eye with a greater consideration for how each account fits into Luke's larger literary and theological context. Sometimes I find myself agreeing with Bailey's interpretations and sometimes with Green's--and many times they reinforce each other's insights! Enjoy Bailey's insights. Let them enrich your understanding of Jesus and add emotional impact to his teachings--and read this book alongside another (such as a good commentary).

A very well written book that delves into the cultural surroundings and understandings of things during Jesus' days. It provides many great insights and adds such depth to many scriptures and



stories that we "Greek minded" readers would gloss right over. Not for the light reader, as it is small print, many pages, and lots of information. The student of theology and cultural history will find it a gem most likely. While it is rather interesting to note the writing style and way that stories were written in a specific pattern, it got pointed out so often that it became a bit tedious; but still interesting just how predominant it is in their style of writing. The first part of the book started with a real attention grabber, revealing based on cultural understandings, that the birth of Jesus was not in a barn as we always picture it. I knew from that point that this book would offer much more depth to the biblical stories, and it sure did. Section two is on the Beatitudes, section three on the Lord's prayer, section four deals with the dramatic actions of Jesus, and were all very interesting and insightful, but it got even more interesting in section five, dealing with Jesus and Women. I admit that he said some thing in this section about women that make me wonder how he would put what Jesus said up against what Paul later said. Of course I own Bailey's follow up book, entitled [book:Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians|11245167], which will reveal the answer (I assume) - once I get around to getting in to it. It was the final section, six, on the parables that I was most captivated. The insight behind how those hearing the stories would have understood them, often shed new light and understanding on them which was intriguing. Though I admit, at times, he tends to try to pull too much out of thing, but it is not so much that it got too annoying. Assuming things from silence could have been left out and the work would not have lost anything; but again, it wasn't so much that it was distracting - just noticeable. Overall a good study and recommended for people who want a little more than a surface level Westerner view of things.

I don't agree with all of Bailey's exegesis, but it is undeniably a great contribution towards understanding the cultural context of the Bible. Helps look at the Gospels and the parables in a whole new light.

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