

CHAPTER 2

Conflict of the Western vs. Eastern Cultures

Timeless Truths, Timely Travel: Understanding Biblical Realities

Someone asked me about why did the Lord say, "I am Alpha and Omega," He didn't speak Greek, so why is that stated in Greek? In the original Hebrew or Aramaic, those words would have been rendered as Alef and Tav. So why the difference? It all comes down to the intersecting influences of Greek and Hebrew culture in ancient Israel.

You see, after Alexander the Great conquered the region in around 332 BC, Greek culture and language began to permeate the area. The ruling classes, including the Ptolemaic dynasty in Egypt, of which Cleopatra, (a Greek, not Egyptian) was a part, spoke and wrote in Greek. However, the common people still primarily used Aramaic in their daily lives.

So we have a mixture. If the text you are examining in Koine Greek was translated from the Hebrew or Aramaic, then alef becomes alpha and tav becomes omega, the first and last letters of the alphabet.

I'm sure you know what a caravan is, right? But have you ever heard of a caravanserai? These were fortified inns or armed forts along ancient trade routes that provided a place for caravans to rest, replenish supplies, and safely spend the night during their long journeys.

To grasp the meaning of this verse in Revelation, 'I am Alpha and Omega,' or as translated in English, 'I am the first and the last,' we need to see how it relates to the caravanserai.

Each caravanserai had armed guards to protect travellers from robbers and thieves. More importantly, they were fortified structures with watchtowers positioned approximately 15 to 30 miles out at the four cardinal points. These allowed guards to spot possible hostile forces or enemy troops approaching.

If a guard saw a foreign army off in the distance, he would ride swiftly to the fort to warn of a possible attack, declaring, 'I am the first; the enemy has been spotted on the distant horizon. Prepare for a possible attack'. If the enemy drew closer, another watchman would ride to the caravanserai and say, 'I am the second; the enemy is drawing near. Prepare to engage.' This warning would hopefully give enough time for any travellers there to flee to the nearest town or city before an imminent battle ensued.

However, if the enemy stealthily ambushed, in the middle of the night, there wouldn't be time for multiple warnings. In such a case, one watchman would ride at full gallop, shouting, 'I am the first and the last, (meaning there is no other warning); the enemy is upon us.'

This scenario parallels what the Lord said about being the Alpha and Omega, in Rev. 22:13. He is the one and only Messiah. As Jesus said, in John 14:6, "...I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Jesus is the first and the last, there is no other. Does that

verse make more sense now?

Let's talk about travel in Bible times. What was the fastest speed anyone could achieve? A whopping 3 mph – and that's if you were lucky enough to be on a horse riding at a steady pace!

Here's the kicker: there were usually about 30 miles between each caravanserai (think ancient roadside inns) along the way between cities. If you tried to ride your horse at full speed the whole time, it would collapse from exhaustion before reaching the next stop! That's why savvy travelers would walk their horses at a nice, easy gait, averaging about 1.5 mph. Using oxen to pull a cart? You'd be crawling along at around 1 mph.

So, in reality, everyone travelled at the blistering speed of 1.5 to 3 mph at best. The only exceptions were those well-maintained, paved Roman roads where you could push your horse to a sustained speed of 4 mph – practically light speed for the time!

Here's a fun fact: a horse can only maintain a burst speed of about 25 mph for roughly 20 minutes before it collapses. And trust me, a dead horse is no good for travel – it'll just slow you down even more!

Now, keeping those sluggish speeds in mind, think about Mary and Joseph's journey from Galilee to Bethlehem. How long would that have taken? Up to three months! I know, with modern cars we could make that trip in a couple of hours, cruising at 70 mph. But for them, on foot with a packed animal, they were making that painstaking trip at 1.5 to 3 mph, depending on their load and the terrain.

They wouldn't have travelled alone either – that's too dangerous. Instead, they'd have joined a caravan, stopping at caravanserais along the way to rest. In fact, the closest caravanserai to Bethlehem is actually where Jesus was born. The "inn" mentioned in the Bible refers to a caravanserai. With all the rooms full, Mary gave birth to Jesus in the area above where the animals were kept – what we'd call a mezzanine. That's where the servants who cared for the animals and watched over travellers' goods would stay.

Ever wonder why it took the wise men over two years to show up after Jesus' birth? Contrary to popular nativity scenes, they didn't arrive at the manger – only the shepherds from nearby fields made it within minutes of Jesus' birth. When the wise men finally arrived, Jesus was about two years old. Matthew 2:11 says, "And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother..." They had set out long before his birth, but why the delay? The Magi travelled from Persia to Israel at a speed of – you guessed it – 1.5 mph.

In our modern world, we're accustomed to zipping around in cars, planes, and high-speed trains. But in biblical times, transportation options were far more limited and much slower. People relied on horses, camels, and oxen for longer journeys, and for most daily travel, they depended on their own two feet – or as I like to call them, their 'magic getaway sticks'!

Let's put this into perspective with a modern example. Imagine your typical 30-minute car commute to work. You're travelling at 65 mph on a freeway, covering perhaps 30-35 miles. Now, picture doing that same journey on foot.

You're not walking on smooth, straight highways, but on winding back roads, possibly having to take detours around obstacles or private property. You're carrying your lunch, maybe some work materials. On the way home, add some groceries to that load. You're moving at 2-3 miles per hour at best, and that's on flat ground.

That 30-mile trip could easily take 10-15 hours one way. Factor in rest stops, the need to find safe paths, and the physical toll of walking such distances, and you're looking at a multi-day journey - just to get to work!

Now imagine doing this in various weather conditions, and you start to grasp the magnitude of travel challenges in biblical times. What we consider a simple daily commute would have been an epic journey for our ancestors.

So, you see that all communication and travel back then was done at this snail's pace of 3mph at most. And journeys between cities weren't undertaken alone - you had to travel in a caravan for safety and provisions, because it's not like there were 7-Elevens conveniently located along the way. You had to carry your changes of clothes, your food and water with you, carefully rationed to last the entire 2-to-3-month journey to your destination.

Now as you were close to arriving at your destination, you wouldn't head straight into the city - not after going 3 months without a proper bath! Phew! No, your first stop was the caravanserai to wash clothes, bathe, and make yourself presentable before entering the city gates. How rough and grueling travel was back then? Hard to conceive, isn't it?

You might be tempted to compare a caravanserai to a modern hotel like Holiday Inn, but that would be foolish. The differences are vast. Caravanserais were lifelines in a dangerous world, not just comfortable stopovers. They offered crucial protection and resources, not just a place to sleep. No Holiday Inn has armed guards watching for armies or grain stores for your camels! In our world of easy travel, we have nothing truly comparable to these ancient sanctuaries.

Are you starting to see why you cannot properly interpret the Bible's teachings without immersing yourself in the original cultural context like this? Those contexts provide the foundational lenses for making sense of everything in the scriptures.

This is the basics of how to do biblical research, and if you don't understand that you will make error upon error.

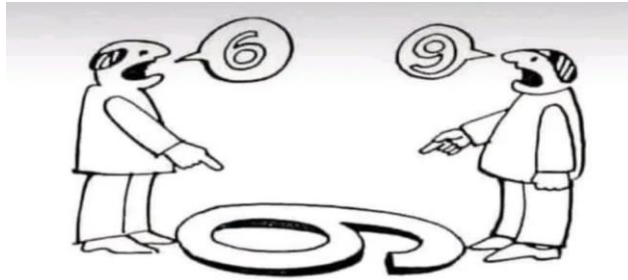
So, when someone claims they've done their own Biblical research, I always ask - who did you do it with? Where did you get your information from? Did you get it from institutions like Cambridge or Oxford? What are your sources?

What I'm sharing with you is pretty intense. I'm showing you where it came from at that time. This is a real eye opener. It is the truth.

This is the word of God, not man. And without understanding the culture, customs, figures of speech, and what was going on at the time, any translation is totally inaccurate. If you think it's from the same culture, you're in, you're making a tremendous error. And you will misunderstand everything that is written. So, is the Word of God in translations? Yes, some translations are easier to ascertain. Others are not, depending on who wrote it, what their motivation was, and what or who were they supporting. Because someone had to pay for that publication.

Assumptions Distort Meaning

Now, what do you see in this picture? We've got two people, facing each other, looking at the same object, but from different perspectives. Right? One insists it's a number 6, while the other is adamant it's a number 9. Is one right and the other wrong? How could you help them see more clearly?



Well, you could have them trade places to see from the other's perspective, but that doesn't really help. What about giving them both a greater vantage point? What if we view it from the top down? Then we see it's just a symbol. But from one point of view, or the other they will continue to argue all day long and never see the greater reality.

This is extremely important to understand when it comes to God's Word.

We cannot associate something that doesn't have an association. It's just a symbol, nothing more. Do not interpret it.

This is where translators are a challenge when the same thing is seen, but interpreted differently from a translator's own experiences, or knowledge. This personal bias leads to translations or interpretations that align more with the translator's background or experience than the original intended meaning, creating a problematic situation for ensuring accuracy. This has been a real nightmare!

We need to understand that both are looking at the same symbol but seeing from different perceptions. Each thinks they are right and the other wrong. Whose side would you take? You see how easy it is to miss the greater reality by only seeing from a limited perception?

To drive this point home, let me use a simple example. Let's see how you do with this sentence:
"Because of the increasing intolerable pain and discomfort, the doctor removed his leg."

Now, what did you understand from that sentence? What happened? Someone lost their leg, right?

It appears that the doctor removed someone's leg. Let's carefully read it again, *"because of the increasing intolerable pain and discomfort the doctor removed his leg"*. Who removed the leg? The doctor, right? Why was the leg removed? Because of the intolerable pain. Whose leg was removed? Would it help to understand that the doctor himself had a prosthetic leg?

See how easy it is to assume that the doctor removed a patient's leg? But it doesn't say that. It says "his" leg, his is a pronoun associated to the closest noun, which is the doctor. The doctor removed his own leg because of the intolerable pain and discomfort. It was a prosthetic. Did you have the

image of him sawing off someone's leg?

You understand the problem? You can read what it says but we tend to put in all this extra superfluous stuff. This is the problem when we read the Bible. We don't let it speak for itself. We interject into it, like the translators did, and then we distort the meaning to fit our own perception.

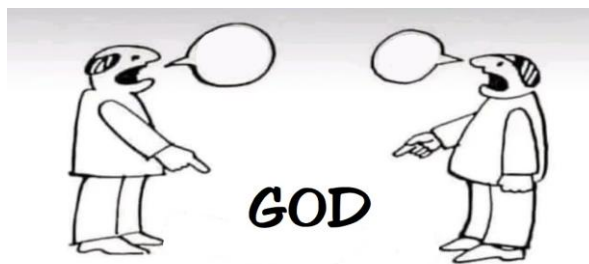
The sentence is 100% accurate either way, yet our assumptions led us to likely misinterpret which "leg" was actually being removed. This perfectly illustrates why making assumptions based on our own cultural experiences can completely distort the intended meaning of Biblical texts.

As Isaiah 55:8-9 states: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

We must constantly fight against letting our modern, preconceptions distort the originally intended meanings and contexts of Scripture.

The God We Think We Know

Now let's replace the symbol in the picture with the word "God".



When someone says God, what image comes to their mind? I have come to the shocking realization: the God that many people envision is not the same God as mine, nor is it the God of the Bible. What's the problem? Because no two people, in our modern Western culture, seem to have the same image of what or who God is. So, when we look at God, what problem do we face?

According to the culture in which Jesus and the whole Bible is written, that included the Persians, that included the Hebrews, but what about the Gentiles, mentioned in the book of Acts? Well, the Gentiles listed on the day of Pentecost, were from the East, not from Rome, according to the Gospels and recorded in Acts 2:9-11. So, what did they all have in common? They only had one God, the living God. I don't care if it's Persian, I don't care if it's any of the cultures of the East. They're all the same.

In the True Way of Life foundational class, I go into great detail on what images are proper for these words, but right now, I'm just going to just keep it very basic.

It's one living God, the source of all life. Every day everything that is done is for the will of the living God. That's the Eastern side. That's from Israel East. Each day of the week is numbered, as in

Genesis. What's the first day of the week called? The first day. What's the second day of the week called? The second day. I know this is hard to understand. What's the third day of the week called? The third day. What's the fourth day of the week called? This is rough, the fourth day. What's the fifth day of the week called? What's the sixth day of the week called? My gosh, is this complicated? And what's the seventh day called? Sabbath. What are you supposed to do on the seventh day? Rest, focus on God, you keep in mind His word, in everything you do.

Let's look at the Greek/ Roman perspective- everything west of Jerusalem. That's the term Occidental, which is where our culture in America comes from. How many gods do we have? Seven of them getting their own day of the week. It's a bit like a divine time-share program.

Now, you might be thinking, "Wait a minute, I don't see any gods in my calendar!" That's because you're living inside this cultural clock, so to speak. It's like trying to see what time it is from inside a watch - not so easy, right? It's like having seven divine bosses, each with their own day to micromanage your life.

What happens on Tuesday? This day is dedicated to the Greek/Roman god Mars (or Ares in Greek). In Spanish, it's called "Martes", which means "Mars' Day. It's not just any old day - it's the day you're supposed to channel your inner warrior.

You wake up on Tuesday, it's time for a fresh start. In fact, you should never start something new on any other day, except Tuesday. This is the day you start off "Carpe Diem" seize the day, you attack your goals, and overcome obstacles.

What happens on Wednesday? It's the day of Mercury, the god of messages and communication. In Germanic or Norse tradition, it's Odin's or Woden's day. In Spanish it's "Miércoles". Coincidentally (or not?), Wednesday is when the most letters and emails are sent out. The US mail experiences its highest volume, and email servers work overtime. It seems we're all unwittingly playing the role of Mercury's messengers, furiously communicating mid-week.

What happens on Thursday? It's Thor's day in Germanic tradition, Jupiter's day in Latin (Jueves in Spanish). This is when leaders traditionally speak - presidents, kings, company executives. Jupiter, the ruling god, was believed to empower leaders, his influence manifesting in their public addresses. Even today, many organizations schedule important announcements for Thursdays. It seems the spirit of Thor is still thundering through boardrooms and press conferences! So the next time your boss calls a Thursday meeting, you'll know they're just following the Greek/Roman god's schedule.

What happens on Friday? This day is dedicated to love across various cultures. In Latin-based languages, it's Venus' day - 'Viernes' in Spanish, named after the Roman goddess of love. Germanic cultures call it Frigg's day (or Frigg in Norse mythology), honoring the goddess of love and fertility. Friday is traditionally when people connect with loved ones, call their sweethearts, or go out for date night. It seems we're still following Venus's romantic playbook, even if we don't realize it. No wonder everyone's in such a good mood on Fridays - we're all under Frigg's spell!

What happens on Saturday? Well, Saturday is the day of Saturn. Saturn is the nemesis of Jupiter. You don't want to make Saturn upset by worshipping Jupiter, so now you worship Saturn. Saturn was associated with breaking social norms, and we've certainly kept that tradition alive.

Think about it: Saturday night is when ethics and morals seem to go out the window. It's when many throw caution to the wind, indulging in behavior they'd never dream of any other day of the week. That's usually when young women lose their virginity, men get into accidents. Every dumb thing that anyone does is on a Saturday. drinking? Check. Questionable decision-making? Absolutely. It's as if we're all still participating in some unconscious homage to Saturn, shedding our weekday morals like an uncomfortable coat.

This sound familiar? Now what happens after Saturday?

Well now Jupiter is all upset because you supported his enemy. So, what do you do on Sunday? Well, you go to the Temple of Apollo. You confess what you've done wrong, to the high priest, "yeah, I got drunk and danced around the room naked and got arrested by the police for indecent exposure", you know, and you tell them all these things. And he has you pray, and you get a little disc, which looks like a little sun disc made of bread, and they give it to you to eat. Then Apollo will take that confession that you gave the high priest and take it to Jupiter/ Zeus, to let him know that you regret what you've done. Does any of this sound familiar? Right as the sun sets on Sunday evening, he has delivered your message to Jupiter.

Now on Monday morning you've got to show remorse for what evil you've done. So, you wake up, with a hangover, and go, 'Oh, I wish I hadn't gotten drunk on Saturday. Oh, I wish I hadn't gotten that speeding ticket. Oh, I really hate what I did'. Because you want Jupiter to forgive you. That's why you do nothing except look sad and depressed on Monday. You gotta say how regretful you were, how stupid you were on Saturday. You have to tell people how you feel. You don't walk in to work on Monday all cheerful, and say, "Yay, it's Monday!" You're going to have everything thrown at you, with people saying shut up!

So, there you have it - a week ruled by gods, each with their own cosmic domain. Our calendar is basically a pantheon party. It's like the ancient gods are still pulling our strings, deciding when we work, war, woo, and wind down.

In Greek/Roman culture, actors were revered as demigods. They were worshipped and seemingly could do no wrong. Some of the greatest - and most evil - deeds were performed by actors and gladiators. The gladiatorial games in the great Colosseum drew devoted fans who painted themselves and cheered raucously. They'd attend games on Mondays to please Jupiter, shouting to catch the god's attention. Sound familiar?

Why do we do what we do today? Unknowingly, we're still worshipping these Roman gods. These practices are so deeply ingrained that we rarely question or investigate their origins.

Eastern cultures, by contrast, had no concept of acting as we know it. They considered pretending to be something you're not as lying and deception. Yet in our Greek/Roman-influenced culture, acting is everything. We glorify those who deceive us, making us believe they're something they're not. We even give them awards for their deception!

Take Tom Cruise, for instance. Is he really a fighter pilot? I've seen him fly in movies, but is he actually any of those roles he portrays in the movies? No, yet people treat him as if he embodies these roles. He's just one small example. What about sports figures? The list goes on and on.

Trying to fit the Bible into a culture already primed to worship seven gods each week creates a real mess. We can't play this game - it simply doesn't work. I have books from the fourth century, all about people trying to make the Bible fit into this culture. And guess what? It doesn't.

In the Greek/Roman pantheon, gods hassle each other and can be tricked, coerced, or bargained with. So what happens when someone in our Western culture learns God's Word and thinks, 'How do I get God to do what I want?' What? Get God to do what you want? You've got it all backwards. God has already written His Word. He doesn't deviate from His Word.

I know in Homer's Iliad and the Odyssey; you see characters tricking gods and bargaining with them. And I see people trying to do that today. Some even think, 'I'm going to talk to Satan to see if

he can get me a better deal since God won't do what I want.' I'm serious - people actually have conversations with Satan, saying, 'If you do this for me, here's what I'll do for you.' What? That's not how it works!

It's not God on one side, Satan on the other, and other gods in between. You either have the one true living God, or you do not. This idea that there's God and also all these other gods you can manipulate is wrong. If you think like that, you don't know the true God - you only know the Greek/Roman gods. You've never truly read God's Word.

In Greek/Roman culture, there's no written standard. All is subject to emotions. But in Eastern culture - the Hebrew to Persian side - the Word of God is set and cannot be altered or changed. It's done, it is written. Either you align with it, or you miss it. It's that simple.

One side has a totally different image than the other when they say 'God'. I keep emphasizing this because people want the God of the Bible to be Jupiter. They call Him God, and they want Jesus to be Apollo. 'If I confess my sins to Apollo, he'll take them to God and I'm forgiven.' Wait a minute, that's not what we're talking about. You don't know what the Word says.

I don't care which version - just read it. If you want to go deeper, we can take it from there. But people don't read any of them. They just talk about it, asking, 'What did this person say?' or 'What does that person say?' If you ask people from the West to interpret it for you, they'll push you in their direction. If you ask people from the East, they'll push you in that direction. I'm not saying either one is right. The question is, what does God's Word say?

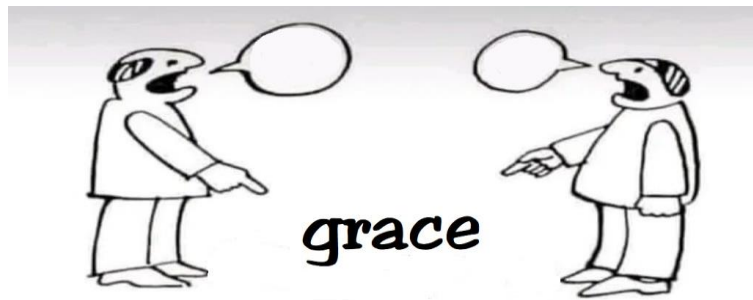
If you go too far to one side, you lose it. Go too far to the other side, you lose it too. Let the Bible interpret itself. And the Bible is not that difficult to understand, provided you don't take sides.

Going back to our original illustration, you understand what that symbol is? You can reproduce it. But the moment you call it a 6 or 9, you blew it. Don't change the symbol. Don't change what God says to fit your limited perception. Let the Bible interpret itself. What if God says that symbol is a small letter G. Now what? And this person says it's 9, or that one a 6. Just stick with what it says. And it has no contradictions. Keep it center line.

All right, ready for another word?

Here is another one that may challenge your assumptions.

The Distorted Conception of "Grace"



Now let's look at the word grace. I remember what I was taught, as a child, let's say grace, "Thank you for the world, so sweet, thank you for the food we eat, thank you for the birds that sing, thank you, Lord for everything". That was what I thought was grace. That is not grace! Former Roman Catholic here. I'm not saying Roman Catholics are bad. It just depends what you're looking for. The question is, what does God's Word say about grace? What is grace? 'She's so graceful when she walks.' All right, great. What does grace mean? From our Greek/Roman culture, we know what grace is, or do we? Where does grace come from? Why was it translated grace in the Bible? Let's look at it. Now here's where we're going to get down to the metal.

So on the West side we have Zeus, or Jupiter. He had sexual relationships with various relatives. Which produced 12 daughters, three graces, and nine muses. These divine creatures imparted their gifts, skills and abilities arbitrarily, without rhyme or reason to random people, unmerited.

The three Graces were: Aglaea, represented beauty, adornment and glory. Euphrosyne, represented joy, mirth, merriment. And Thalia represented festivity, rich banquets, luxurious celebrations.

Of the nine Muses there were: Calliope, Clio, Erato, Euterpe, Melpomene, Polyhymnia, Terpsichore, Thalia, and Urania.

Calliope, which is epic poetry. To be able to be a poet requires Calliope be to be able to inspire you, to be your muse. She enters into you then you have this wonderful gift.

Clio is the god of history. That's why the Greeks history is never accurate, because people had to wait for Clio to enter into them, and they saw history and they would write it down. No accuracy.

Erato is one of the Greeks and Romans favorite. You know what eroticism is, right? If you want someone to be sexually attracted to you, what you do is you try and get Erato to enter into them. The symbol is the little cupid with the arrow. That comes from Erato. That's why they say love is a gift from God. No, it's social insanity and it's not a gift.

Euterpe is the muse that gives the gift of playing musical instruments or singing. If you're a magnificent singer that's because Euterpe entered into you.

Greeks were crazy about actors. The actors were prayed to. They had temples for actors. Actors could do no wrong because they had the gods in them. Melpomene was the one that entered into them, then right behind that could be Calliope, or it could be Clio and then Erato and you could be filled with all these muses. So acting was extremely precious because you had to get these muses in you so you could be something you're not.

Melpomene is tragedy. You ever see those masks, tragedy and comedy? That comes from Melpomene and Thalia, those are those two masks, you see an acting. So you go to school for acting to get the spirit of these muses into you. Do you know the actor Sean Bean? He's an actor that always dies in every movie. What is he? He is an outstanding tragic actor. He has Melpomene enter into him, if you look from the Greek and Roman point of view.

Polyhymnia is one that is gifted with the talent of poetry, or hymn. Our rap artists today that make everything rhyme would be inspired or possessed by Polyhymnia.

Terpsichore is the ability to dance. Some people just can't dance. No matter how you get them on the dance floor they're like Frankenstein trying to dance. Well, what you do is you pray for Terpsichore to go into them, and then all of a sudden, they're Fred Astaire, or John Travolta (for you, younger folks). So that's Terpsichore.

These gifts are arbitrarily given. You don't know who's going to have this skill. You hear people say, "Oh my god, you're such a great dancer or a great actor". And how do they reply? "It's a gift from God". That's what we're talking about.

Then we have Thalia (not to be confused with the Grace, with the same name). Thalia is the one that gives the ability to be a comic actor. In which we have people like Robin Williams. Every time he opens his mouth you cannot stop laughing. That's being graced by the muse Thalia.

The last one is Urania. This is the muse that the scientists, and astrologers want to be gifted with. This allows you to be skilled in mathematics or astronomy. Urania is the muse that's required.

The propensity for any of these skills or abilities was considered a gift graced via one or more of the graces or muses. Some person says my gift is by grace. The question is which one? If you are an outstanding singer, or dancer people would ask, where did you get this gift? It's a gift from God. It's grace. Hmm, which one gave it to? We say the same word, but it has different meanings in the Western culture vs. the Bible that was written in the Eastern culture.

On the Eastern side, what does grace mean? The translators translated the Koine Greek word *charis* as grace. They should not have translated it grace. On this side, there's only one God. God gives knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. He doesn't grace you with the talent to play guitar or piano. He doesn't give you the ability to sing or dance. He gives that which is concerning life; knowledge, wisdom and understanding. He gives doctrine, reproof and correction via His Word. There's a written standard.

What is this word in the scriptures? It's the word *charis*. Where does it come from? Well, if the translators did it right, they'd understand it's derived from the word chara, which comes from the Koine Greek, meaning "face". Everyone's face is different. Your face is not like my face. It refers to a person's identity. If you are pulled over by the police, what do they want to see? They want to see an ID with a picture of your what? Your face. Why? That's a legal document saying you are who that ID picture shows. If you produce an ID that's got your face and but different name, guess what? Or if the picture doesn't match your face, you're in trouble! That makes sense?

So *charis* has nothing to do with the graces of the Greek/Roman culture. God does NOT arbitrarily grace certain people with abilities, or favors, to some and not to others. If he did, he would be a respecter of persons. Which He says He is NOT, according to Acts 10:34. *Charis* has everything to do with a person's identity. The word is *charis* in the Koine Greek. It means face or identity.

So, what identity do you get when you increase in knowledge, wisdom and understanding from God's Word? What is the height of your identity? What identities are there? These are the only gifts of God; Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers. These are the identities that God gives. As you learn God's Word, and apply it, then you gain in understanding, with a goal of teaching others. This requires faithfulness. It's consistent, non-stop, repeatedly. In proper order you first become a teacher, then a pastor, helping people understand, you could also become an evangelist, or a prophet or even ultimately an apostle. Those are identities that you can become. The only thing you get from God; knowledge, wisdom and understanding, which is totally different from the world. In this day and time, the Western culture dominates, and we tend to try to fit God into our culture. It doesn't work.

2 Tim 2:2b says, "the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." This has nothing to do with unmerited divine favour, where you get the gift of playing guitar, the gift of dance, the gift of singing. I got it by grace. No! This has nothing to do with this. The word *charis* has nothing to do with the 9 graces. You have to understand the difference.

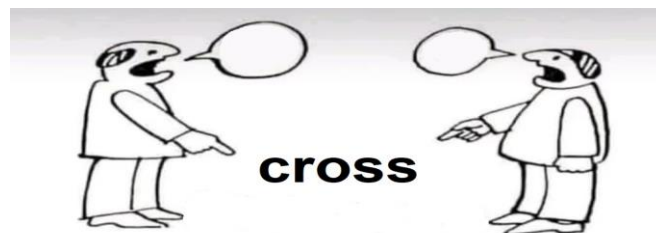
Back to our original illustration, it's not a 6 or 9 it's just as it is, a symbol. But you need to understand what is written in that culture to understand what is being said.

We've got to look at the time in which the New Testament was written. The Old Testament, isn't too difficult. But boy, the New Testament was written in a time when Rome controlled that area, and it was a battle between the Greek/Roman culture and the Eastern culture. It was a head on collision.

You ready for another word? This next one is intense.

Origins of the Cross

Just as we've seen with our exploration of the words 'God' and 'grace', our Western perception of the 'cross' differs significantly from its original context and meaning as well.



Let's dive deeper into this symbol's origins and true meaning in the context of Jesus' time. We're about to uncover some startling truths about one of Christianity's most recognizable symbols. Buckle up and take a deep breath – this revelation about the cross might just leave you in awe, much like that first glimpse of the hidden grotto. Are you ready to challenge your deepest-held beliefs and see beyond the surface of your cultural assumptions?

All right, understand that one side will see this word cross and think one thing, and the other side will see the same word and think of another thing. What side are you on? Wouldn't it be best to see both sides to get the correct perception of the object? This is what I'm giving you, both sides, and an even great perspective, God's.

Now we are going to be looking at the word “*cross*” from both East and West.

The cross on the Greek/Roman side, before Jesus was born, during his life, through the time of the Apostle Paul, and even up to the second century, was just a boundary or territorial marker, period. That's all a cross was. It's nothing to do with the symbol we have today. It was a territorial marker showing where the boundaries are.



This picture shows a Celtic boundary marker in Germany from 300 BC. Notice the German sword in the center, it has nothing to do with Christ. There would be markers like this along property lines to warn people not to cross over the line. Like today we have “No Trespassing” signs to keep people out, right?

Here is another boundary marker, of the Norse, Viking god, Woden, also known as Odin, the father of Thor.



Now on this is stylized version and there are four protruding blades coming out. This preceded Christ by 300 years. It's a boundary marker. If you crossed this marker by god Odin, you'd be dead. It was the symbol of life and death. The Vikings held their boundaries very seriously. The Germans were the same way. The Germans and Vikings constantly were at battle with each other.

So, what was the boundary marker for the Greeks?



Here's an ancient boundary stone of the Greeks. Notice it is missing the side pieces. Can you tell this is Greek? The Greeks were really into the naked male form, as you can tell. This boundary stone marked the end of their territory. That means everything on this side belonged to this person. And any land on the other side belonged to another person, who would have had his own marker. But this guy is really serious. How can you tell he's serious? He's got a grin on this face.

Now as we get closer to the first century, there's another Greek one. This one is not missing the side posts.



This is that boundary marker between Greece and Rome showing this is the Greek side. Basically, letting Rome know to stay on your side.

Now when Caesar came in conquered the Germans what happened was the Romans would put their boundary markers up. But the Germans would see those and say we have no idea what that is and they would proceed to tear them down. Which caused the Romans to go berserk. You just crossed

our boundary! The Germans only acknowledged Woden's cross. So, you can see what territorial infringements and outright battles ensued over boundaries.

Here is a Roman coin, from 29AD.



This is when Octavian pushed the boundaries of Rome into the northern territory of Gaul, and set up his boundaries. Notice it's the same symbol. Nothing changed. So, when you talk about the cross, this is what you're talking about. It's a boundary or territorial marker, period. Even at the time of the writings of the New Testament, that's it.

What happened to the people of the conquered nations? They became members of the Greek/Roman society. Their princes became members of the society of Rome, and their soldiers became the new soldiers of Rome. And they would always carry the cross to plant it to show those lands were owned by Rome. In fact, when the destruction of Jerusalem happened, in the Holy of holiness, one was setup there.

According to Publius Ovidius Naso, a poet and senator of Rome between 17-18 AD, (Jesus was about 20 years old at this time) in his work, "Fasti" he describes the worship. The marker itself would be drenched in the blood of a sacrifice lamb or pig. That because it's the new marker, it's a change. And so, they would say, this is that what used to be is now gone. This is the new and sealed it with death. You cross that line we kill you. After setting up the marker they would have a communal feast, sing hymns and praise of the god Terminus.

We covered previously that they had specific gods for each day of the week, and a god for each month. Now let's look at the old calendar, prior to Rome's Julian calendar. September would be what month? The seventh. October the eighth month, November, the ninth month, December the tenth month. Now when you get to January/ February that marked the end of the year. In the Roman calendar January is Janice. You'd spend the whole time in your house because it's snowing outside. Janice was a two-sided god, one side facing inside the house, and the other facing outside. Starting off in January ending the 23rd of February the god Terminus was worshipped. On the walls, or on the doors they placed the symbol of T. It marked the end of that year. The beginning of the new year started in the month of Mars. What month was Mars worshipped? March. The Romans soldiers would march and attack on the first day of March because that's the month of Mars, the god of war. When did they kill Caesar? On the Ides of March. The beginning of Mars month.

Even our battles in modern times are oriented to the Greek and Roman ways. The blood and the cross, go back to Terminus. When you see a cross, where's it hanging? On a door, or hanging on a end wall. It's hanging on boundaries and shows someone dead.

Eventually the Roman god Terminus, and the god Odin were mixed together. How long did it take? About 300 years, because both countries didn't recognise the others boundary markers so they merged them together. What's that got to do with Christianity? Absolutely nothing.

They called the word cross, a *crux*. Because it's a symbol, like a T, or an X shape where one part crosses the other. Now there's only one place in the Bible where it says that Jesus left the judgement with a *crux*. The *crux* is not what he was crucified on. He was crucified on *stauros*. What he was carrying was the Roman 'end of life' symbol. This designated that his judgement had been passed. What is this symbol in the Roman culture? Terminus. This was the symbol to show he was condemned, and on the boundary of life and death. They put it around his neck, so everyone would see him and know he was the one condemned to be put to death. How many people are walking around today with crosses around their necks? If they lived back in the first century, how would people view that?

Now I understand this is rather freaky because people say, the cross is the symbol of Christianity. No, it's not, not in the time of Jesus, not in the time of the Apostles, of the writings New Testament. The cross had nothing to do with Christianity.

Ok, let's just say the cross is a symbol of Christianity. Now follow my logic here. What if Jesus was shot with the machine gun? Would people be wearing a machine gun around their neck? What if he was stabbed to death, would they be wearing a knife around their neck? You understand the stupidity of this? The Devil was the one that was behind killing Jesus, but God raised Him from the dead, so really, we should be wearing a symbol of an open cave around our neck. Doesn't that make more sense?

Stop and think about this, let's picture a big game hunter, a guy that goes out and kills a rhinoceros or a big ol polar bear. In his house would be his trophies of his big kills. Right? Now, let's picture the devil, as the ultimate game hunter. If you walked into his house, what would you see? What are his greatest victories, prized kills? Well, there'd be the head of John the Baptist. There'd be the head of Isaiah. Why? Because he had them killed. What was the devil's greatest victory, his "*piece de resistance*", that would be showcased in his trophy room? It would be the crucified Jesus. That's the greatest joy of the adversary, his greatest conquest. So why are people wearing crosses?

Now if you want to it accurately ask any archaeologist, they'll tell you this. But oh my gosh, it's a touchy subject, that can cause people to be offended. Why should truth cause the problem? Does it cause a problem with you?

Jesus said, in Luke 4:4, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God" And in Luke 6:46, Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?"

People put a cross on the wall, what does that have to do with anything? They've got the symbol of the god Terminus on their wall, mixed with Woden. Now what?

People say, well to me, that's Jesus. Well then what is something Jesus taught? By the way, Jesus ain't dead, he was raised from the dead. The only victory that you're celebrating, with the cross, is the adversary killing him. If you are on the devil's side, his greatest victory was the crucifying of Jesus. Understand, this makes no sense whatsoever. So, let's stay within the scriptures. Now I told you at the times of the writings of the New Testament, what was a cross? It's a boundary marker, end of story! Go back in time, was there any time that a cross was not the boundary marker? No! It's always been a boundary marker.

The Symbol of Christianity: the Cross or the Yoke?

Now let's look at it from the East side. Here we have the word cross in Matthew 16:24. But that's not the word *crux*. It's a totally different word. Remember if Jesus is your Lord, then you do what he says. Well, in Matt. 16:24, "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself..." That's a strange statement. "...and take up his cross and follow me." Why is this word translated cross? The person who translated this was on which side? See the problem?

Let's dive deeper into the waters of biblical interpretation, much like exploring that hidden grotto. We'll start by examining Matthew 11:29-30: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." This parallels Matthew 16:24 in the same book, where Jesus speaks of taking up one's cross. Are these terms - yoke and cross - referring to the same concept? The subject matter is the same, but the nouns differ.

Remember, the Bible interprets itself in context and through its usage in other places.

In Matthew 16:24, the word 'cross' is '*stauros*' in Koine Greek. We're dealing with Eastern culture here, not Western. What is a *stauros*? It's a pole, stake, or long log. Now, what's the 'yoke'? In Koine Greek, it's '*zygos*' - typically a wooden beam placed on the necks of two oxen to keep them together.

But wait, in I Peter 2:24, we encounter yet another term: "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body, on the tree..." A yoke, a cross, and now a tree? This might seem confusing at first glance.

We know it can't be the cross as we typically envision it. Jesus wasn't a real fan of Terminus. When he left for judgment, he did bear a *crux*, around his neck, symbolizing the end of his life. Remember, February 23 marked the day of Terminus - the end of the year in the Roman calendar. The new year began in March, the month of Mars.

In I Peter 2:24, "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed." This verse refers to the blood covenant, which no one really knows anything about. The word tree is '*xylon*', meaning a tree trunk. So now we have three different words all referring to the same concept. How is this possible? We're not talking about Western culture here, but Eastern.

This statue is from an Archaeological site at Halicarnassus, of a Roman crucifixion, from 1st century AD.

Where is the terminus? It's not there. It's just a tree, with the branches cut off it. Sometime they tied or nailed their hands, sometime their feet, depending on the crime they were accused of. Jesus was nailed in both hands and feet.

But they just hung them up there to die from exposure, and from animals eating their flesh.

So that's how Rome ruined someone's whole day.



Here's another *stauros*, which is also called a yoke, which is also called a *zygos*, or a *zylon*. Is it a tree trunk? Yes. Is it a log? Yes. Is it a *stauros*? Yes. You see what I'm saying? It's used for all three.



This picture is from India, but these yoked oxen were and are still used in many countries in the East. What is that called that ties the oxen together? A *stauros*, a *zygos*, or a *zylon*. They are the same thing. That is not a cross. This is the Eastern culture.

To understand the metaphor, of taking Christ's yoke upon you, you see how we needed to explore what yokes were and how they were used in ancient agricultural settings. A yoke was a wooden beam, carved from a single tree trunk or stake, that was placed over the necks of two oxen, allowing them to pull a plow or cart together. The yoke distributed the burden evenly between the animals and helped them work in unison towards a common goal.

When Jesus calls his followers to take up their cross and follow him (Matthew 16:24), it's important to understand what he means in light of the historical and cultural context. In the Biblical narrative, Jesus was crucified on a simple upright stake or pole, known as a *stauros* in Koine Greek, rather than the familiar Roman cross with a crossbar, (*crux*) the symbol of Terminus.

The call to take up one's cross is not about suffering or martyrdom, as is mistakenly assumed. Instead, it is a powerful metaphor for the life of committed discipleship. Both the cross and the yoke symbolize the life of one who is fully committed to following Jesus' example, sharing in his purpose, and joining in his work of redemption, to carry out the Will of God.

Do you see it now? It's not about choosing one interpretation over another. We need to understand both perspectives, recognizing that the truth is far greater than either. Translations can be challenging, and it's crucial to avoid interpreting from our own limited perception or understanding. Yet, how often do we find ourselves falling into this trap?

Isaiah 55:8-9 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts. Neither are your ways my ways sayeth the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the Earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

No matter what you think you know, I guarantee it's not the full depth of what the Word says. It's not about any one person's interpretation, but God's perspective alone. That's what truly matters. That's everything.

This is the Word of God. And when you truly grasp it, you begin to enter that magnificent cavern of divine wisdom. Like that awe-inspiring underwater grotto, once you discover these profound truths, you never want to leave. The depths of God's Word, like the hidden wonders of that grotto, continue to amaze and transform us as we explore them.