





COMMON ERRORS IN BIBLE INTERPRETATION

(APRIL 19) HERMENEUTICAL ERRORS

(APRIL 26) IGNORING GENRE

(MAY 3) IGNORING LINGUISTICS

(MAY 10) IGNORING TRANSLATIONS

(MAY 17) IGNORING CONTEXT P1

(MAY 24) NO CLASS—MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND

(MAY 31) IGNORING CONTEXT P2

(JUNE 7) IGNORING FIGURES OF SPEECH

(JUNE 14) IGNORING HISTORY

(JUNE 21) IGNORING CULTURE

(JUNE 28) IGNORING THEOLOGY P1

(JULY 5) NO CLASS—FOURTH OF JULY WEEKEND, 250TH

(JULY 12) IGNORING THEOLOGY P2

(JULY 19) IGNORING APPLICATION P1

(JULY 26) IGNORING APPLICATION P2

WHY ARE YOU
SO UPSET?

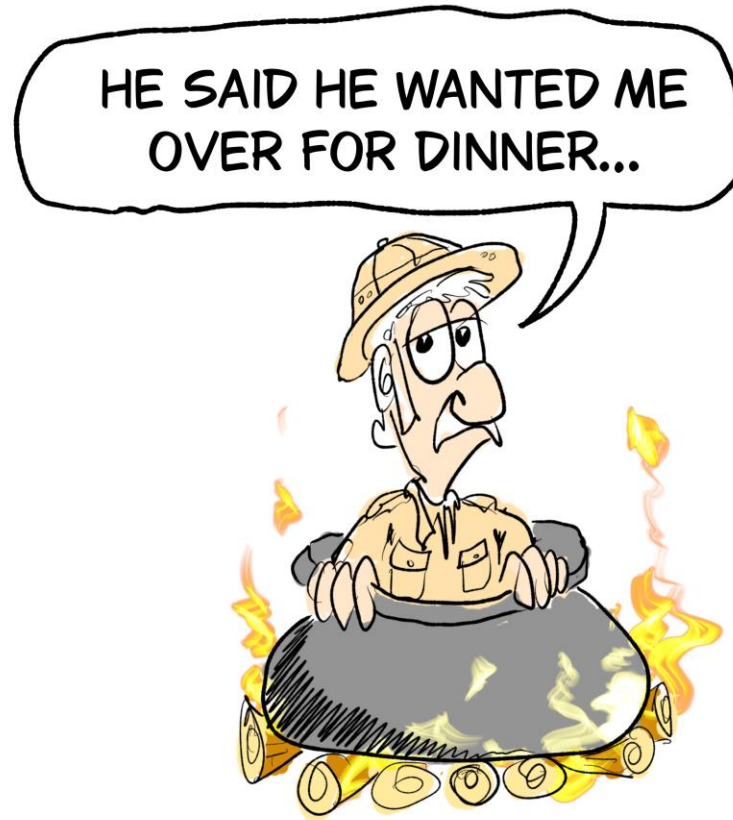
爸爸生日快樂!



WHAT
HAPPENS
WHEN YOU
IGNORE
CULTURE...

**What cultural differences have you experienced?
Travels, meeting other people, etc.**

What are the consequences of ignoring cultural differences?





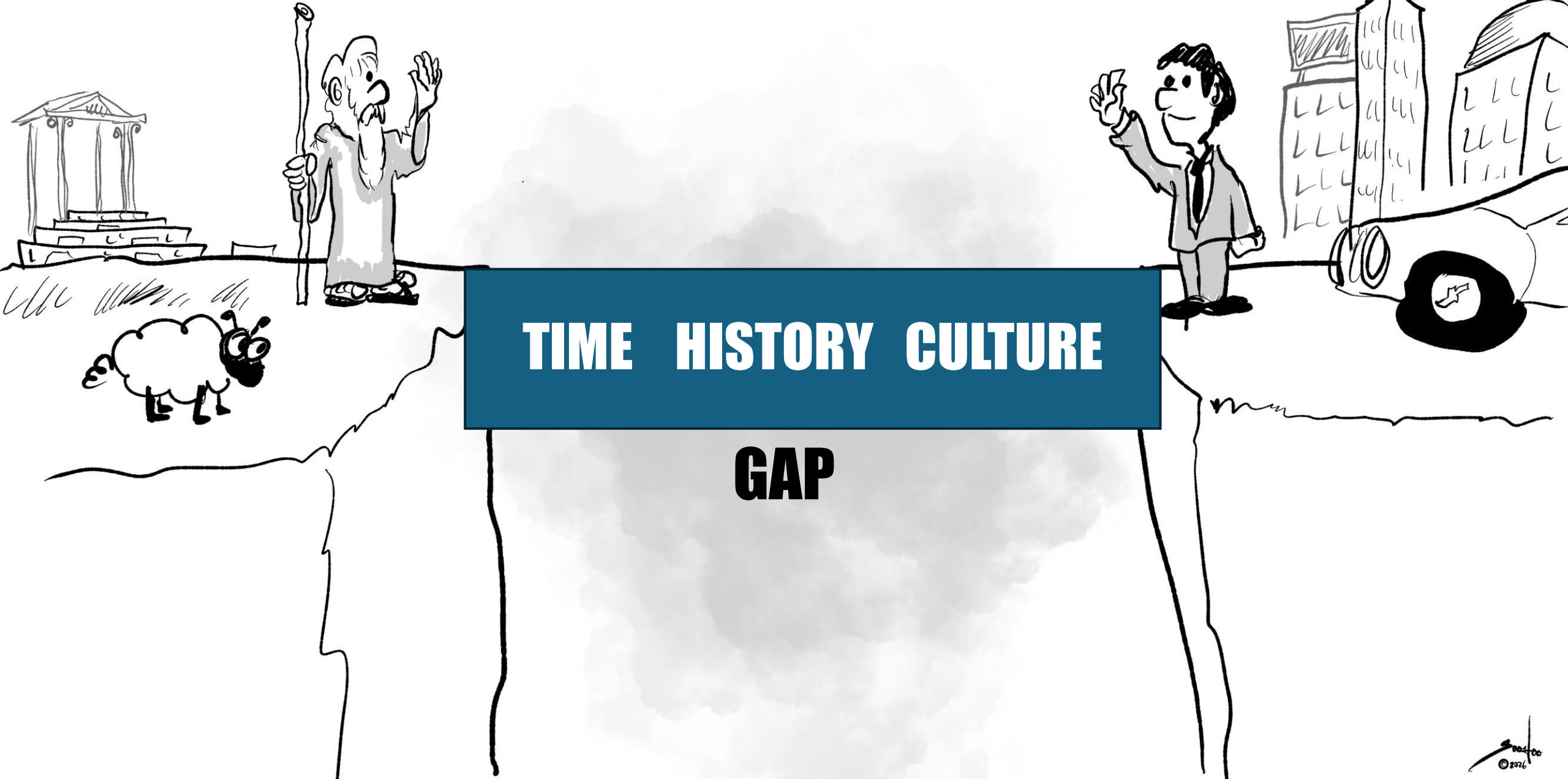
**There are CONSEQUENCES
if you ignore cultural
backgrounds when interpreting
Scripture**

THEN

NOW →

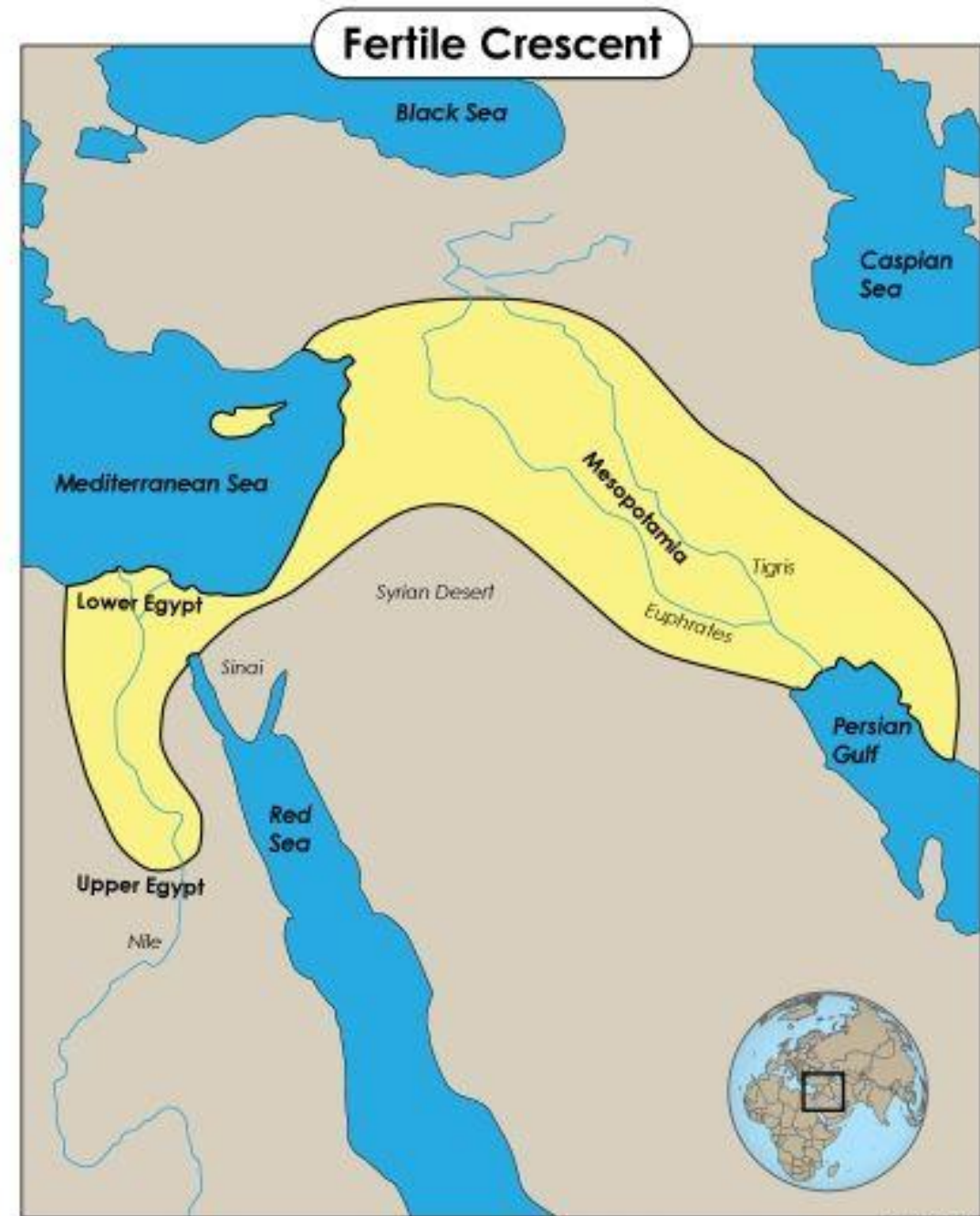
TIME HISTORY CULTURE

GAP



Cultures Relevant to Bible Interpretation

- OLD TESTAMENT
- **Ancient Near East (ANE) cultures**
 - Mesopotamian (Babylonians, Sumerians, Akkadians) The Fertile Crescent
 - Assyrians
 - Canaanites
 - Egyptians
 - Hittites

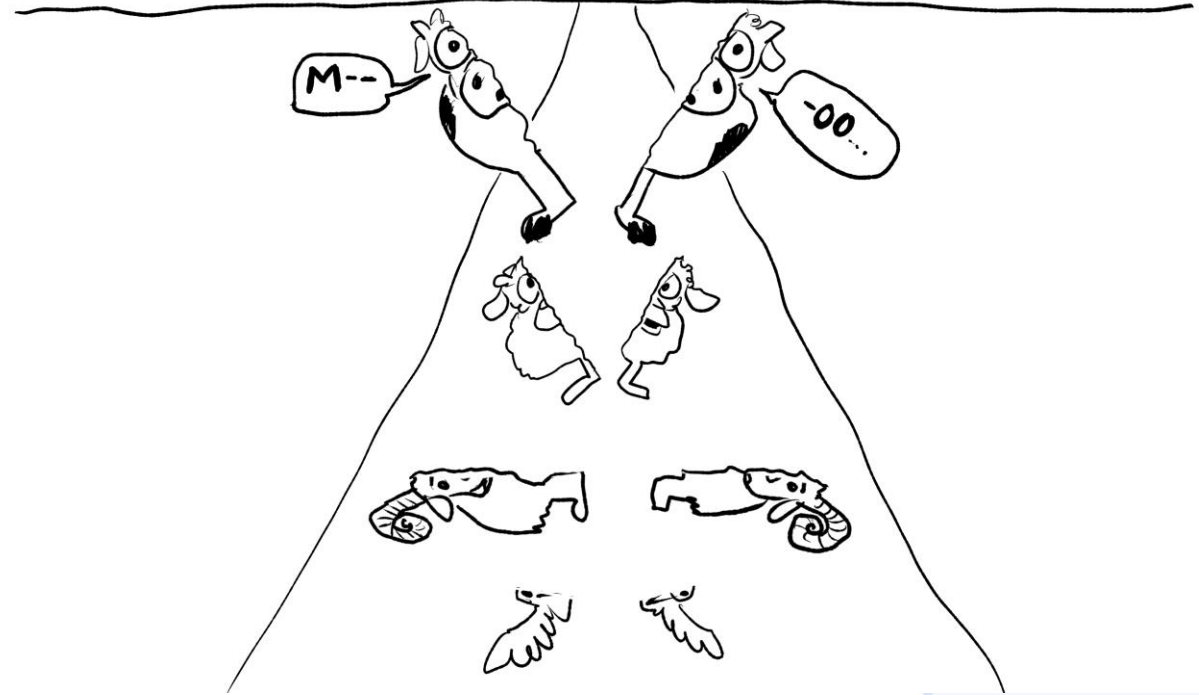


Cultural Characteristics

- Monarchical (sovereigns, kings)
- Temple worship—various deities
- Covenants/treaties—suzzerainty-vassal
- Honor/shame
- Clan/family identity
- Agrarian society
- Oral traditions

Old Testament Examples

- Abrahamic Covenant—(Gen 15)
 - Covenantal elements similar to some ANE practices
- Creation stories
 - Genesis creation was in stark contrast to typical ANE mythologies
- Royal imagery
 - Psalms—God as King of the universe



Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) Deities vs. Hebrew God		
Concept of God	Ancient Near Eastern View	Hebrew Biblical View
Number of gods	Many gods with different powers and domains	One supreme Creator God (YHWH)
Origin of gods	Gods often have origins, generations, or cosmic backgrounds	God exists before creation and is not part of creation
Relationship to creation	Gods are often connected to nature and cosmic forces	God creates and rules over nature
Creation	Creation myths often involve conflict among gods and ordering chaos	Genesis presents creation by God's word and intentional design
Humans	Humans often created to serve the gods' needs	Humans made in God's image with dignity and responsibility
Kings and rulers	Kings may be viewed as divine or semi-divine representatives	Rulers are accountable humans under God's authority
Sun, moon, stars	Often associated with divine beings or worship	Created objects that serve God's purposes
Moral character	Gods may be powerful but morally inconsistent	God is holy, righteous, and faithful
Relationship with humans	Humans often appease gods through rituals	God initiates covenant relationship with humanity

Old Testament Examples

- Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25)
- Birthright and Blessing
- Naïve reading: Esau made a foolish trade for some food.
- Cultural aspects:
 - firstborn had inheritance rights
 - Leadership status
 - Family authority
 - The blessing transferred identity, covenant, future inheritance.
- Fuller interpretation: Esau showed contempt for something much more serious.

Old Testament Examples

- Laws on Slavery (Exodus 21) “If you buy a Hebrew servant...”
- Naïve reading, “The Bible endorses slavery”
- Cultural context: Slavery in ancient Israel was very different.
 - Debt servitude (indentured)
 - Survival from poverty
 - Humane treatment of war prisoners
 - Laws limited abuse
 - Regulated treatment of slaves
 - Had release provisions
- Corrected reading: the text must be understood within the ancient legal limitations. Do not import your modern slavery concepts into this.

NEW TESTAMENT

Second Temple Jewish Culture

- Between return from exile (538 BC) to destruction of Temple (70 AD)
- Religious factions and hierarchies, synagogues
- Under occupation by Romans
- Male/Female roles expectations in private life and legal requirements



New Testament examples

- Washing the disciples feet (John 13:1-17)
- Naïve interpretation: Christians should be nice humble
- Reading with Culture in mind:
 - Feet washing was performed by lowly servants.
 - Overturning of an entire social system.
 - The greatest person in the room was washing the students' feet.
 - Christian leadership is servanthood.

New Testament examples

- The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)
- Naïve interpretation: rebellious son is forgiven by loving father.
- Reading with Culture in mind:
 - Asking for inheritance is like saying, “I wish you were dead.”
 - Father does shocking things such as publicly
 - running towards his son
 - Embracing him
 - Restoring him
 - Father absorbs humiliation, social cost

New Testament examples

- The Women at the Tomb of Jesus (Luke 24:1-11)
- Naïve interpretation: the presence of the women as first witnesses was just incidental. Nothing significant.
- Reading with Culture in mind:
 - The witness value of women was essentially zero. Considered unreliable.
 - The disciples even regarded what the women were saying as “nonsense.”
Verse 11
 - Great apologetic value...

Questions to consider...

- What Asian cultural values might actually be helpful in appreciating certain biblical concepts?
- What western cultural values might hinder our understanding of the Bible?

Summation

- The Bible was written in a specific time and in a specific CULTURE and history.
- We must understand the cultural values and practices of the time of the writing in order to accurately understand the bible passage.
- We cannot IMPOSE our own cultural norms on the Bible
- IGNORING culture distorts the message.

NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION



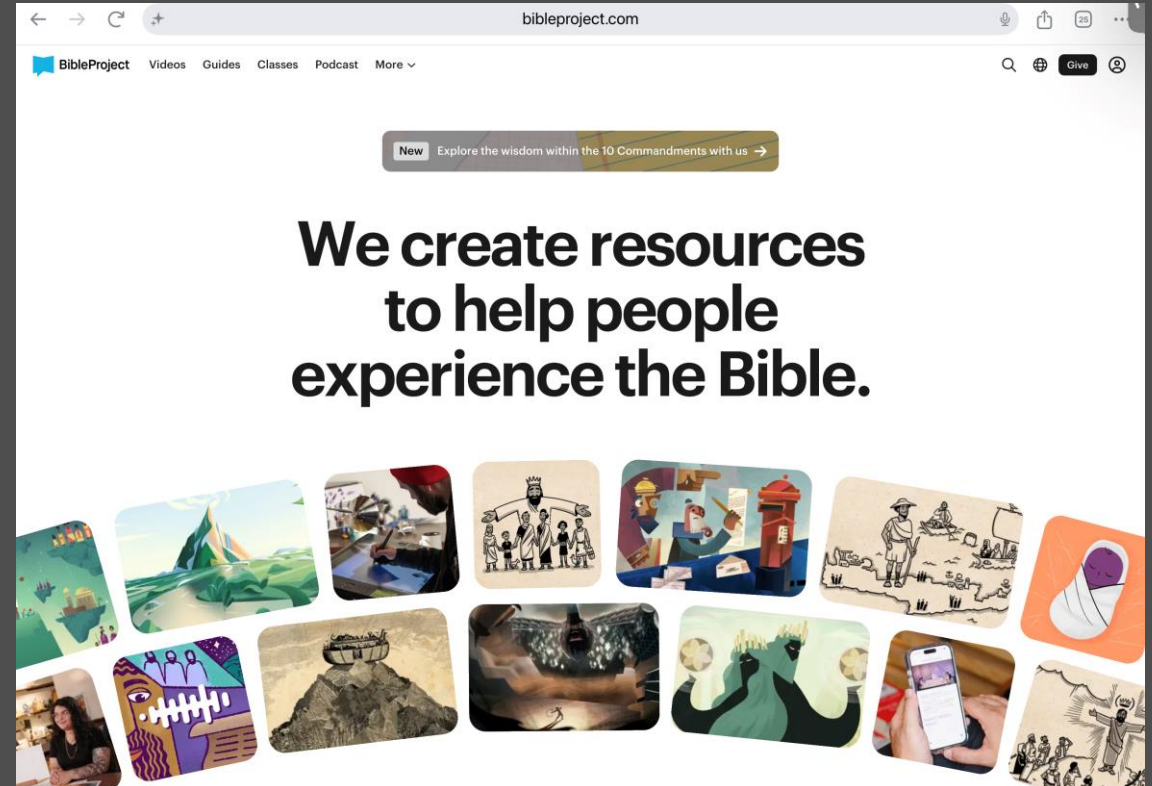
NIV

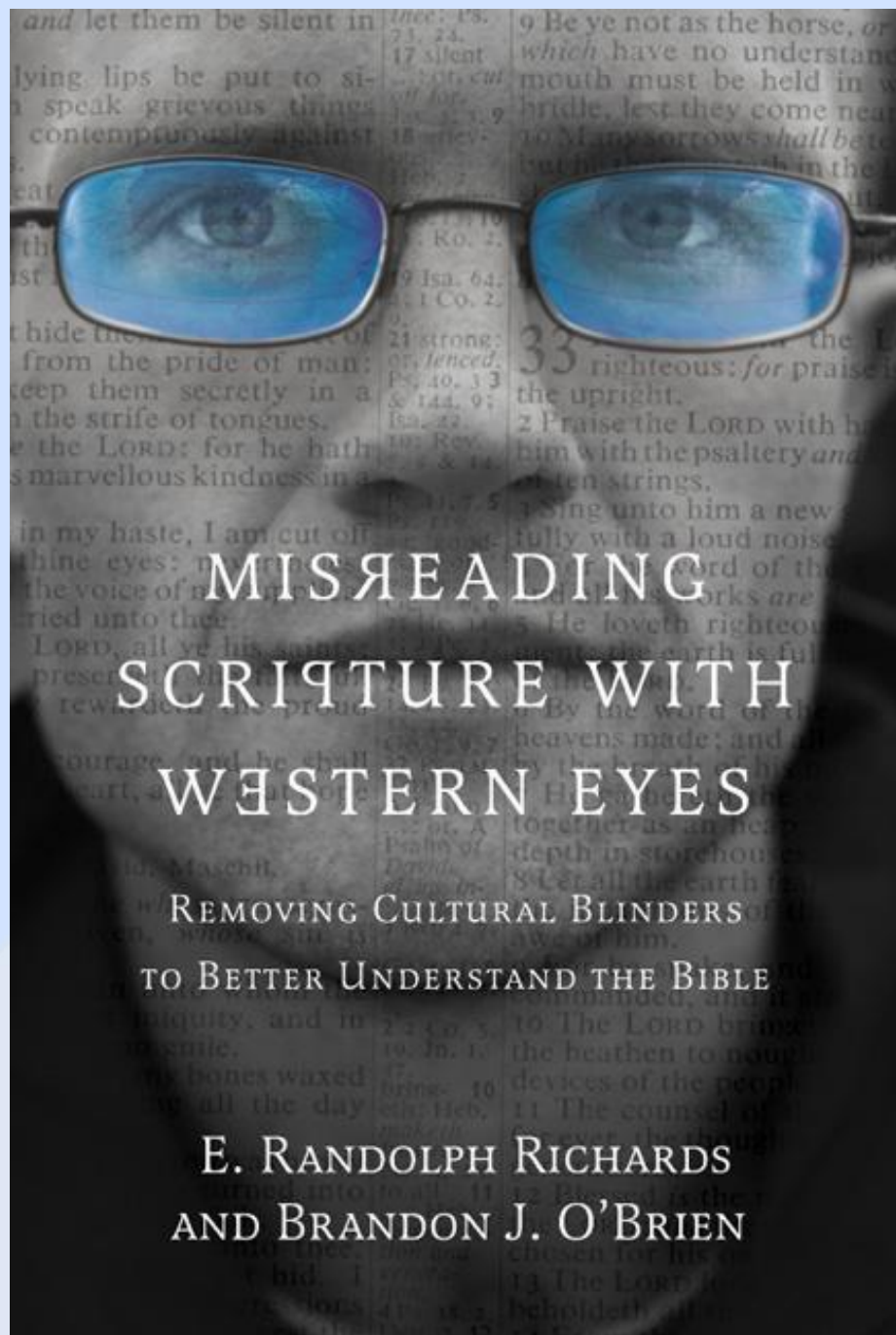
CULTURAL
BACKGROUNDS
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STUDY BIBLE

Bringing to Life the Ancient World of Scripture



Online: www.bibleproject.com





What was clear to the original readers of Scripture is not always clear to us. Because of the cultural distance between the biblical world and our contemporary setting, we often bring modern Western biases to the text.

...Biblical scholars Brandon O'Brien and Randy Richards...identify nine key areas where modern Westerners have significantly different assumptions about what might be going on in a text.

O'Brien and Richards show how better self-awareness and understanding of cultural differences in language, time and social mores allow us to see the Bible in fresh and unexpected ways.

NEXT WEEK"
WHAT
HAPPENS
WHEN YOU
IGNORE
THEOLOGY

