

*Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes:
Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible*

E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien
Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 2012, 220 pages

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It would not be overstating to say every Christian should become familiar with this book. *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes* exposes a number of blind spots shared by typical Western readers of the Bible. However, the authors, both theologians by training, do so without sounding hopelessly anti-western (as if only non-westerners can understand Scripture). Richards frequently draws from his previous experience as a missionary in Indonesia. Their ideas are effectively communicated and not overcomplicated by the countless nuances of interpretive theory. Since my own dissertation concerned this theme, I can confidently say this is one of the most accessible books one will find on the topic.

The writers repeatedly demonstrate specific ways that our cultural lens either helps or hinders our interpretation of Scripture. They do not propose a new hermeneutical method. Rather, they simply challenge us to examine first ourselves—those who use such methods. Even if people quibble with some of their views, the range and specificity of their examples give people reason to take their arguments seriously. They repeatedly suggest ways that Westerners selectively read Scripture, unevenly emphasize sin according to our "cultural mores," and confuse a passage's meaning with its application.

The book is divided into three parts. The first section makes explicit many unspoken assumptions that influence our way of reading the Bible but that are foreign to the text and its ancient cultures. The second section reflects on non-western cultural views on honor, shame, collective identity, and time. In many respects, those in the majority world (as compared to the typical Westerner) have a worldview far closer to those who lived in the cultures of the Bible. The third part is sure to alarm a few people because it takes direct aim at a few "non-biblical" or "anti-biblical" Western values. What if God does not treat everyone the same? What if he does not have plans to prosper me personally and there is no worm for the early bird? They nicely show how even our misunderstandings stem from basically right instincts but easily veer off at certain points. Each chapter concludes with a list of practical suggestions and questions to assist the reader in applying the various insights discussed in the chapter.

For many, the book will offer a dose of humility with hope. One is encouraged to admit, "I don't know" while at the same time spurred on to study the Bible more. Missionaries will be challenged to think more theologically and to listen respectfully to nationals who live around them. Theologians will be forced to consider how the adage, "context is king" applies to their *own* worldview. This is a perfect book to discuss within small groups at church or as teams on the mission field.

Some Related Books

Clark, David K., *To Know and Love God: Method for Theology*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2003.

Elmer, Duane. *Cross-Cultural Connections: Stepping Out and Fitting In Around the World*. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2002.

Tennent, Timothy C. *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2007.