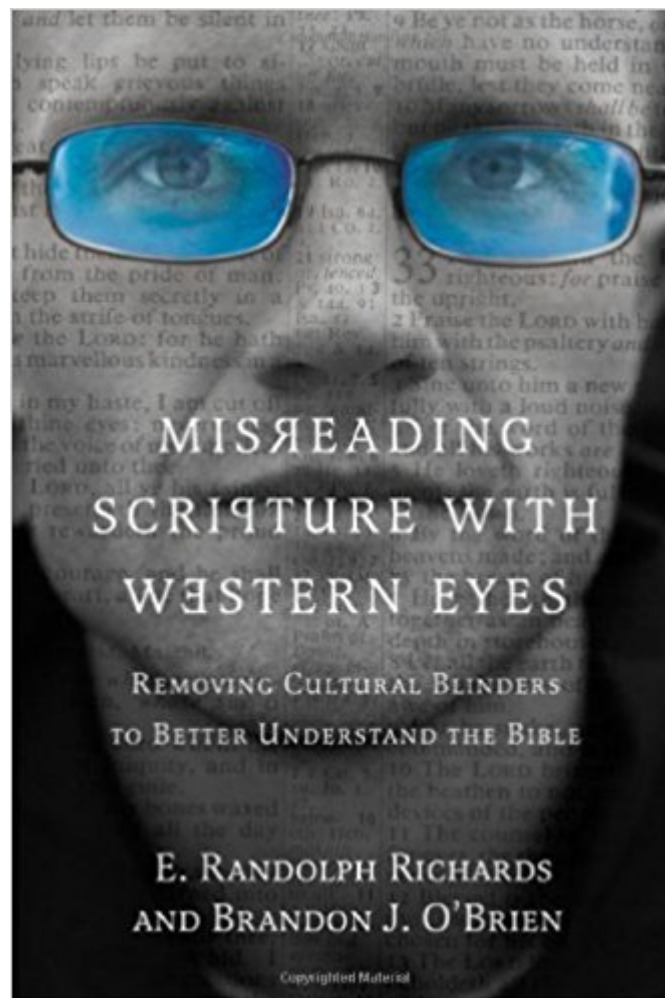


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# Misreading Scripture With Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders To Better Understand The Bible



## Synopsis

Bookwiser's Favorite Books of the Year, Non-Fiction 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. For example: When Western readers hear Paul exhorting women to "dress modestly," we automatically think in terms of sexual modesty. But most women in that culture would never wear racy clothing. The context suggests that Paul is likely more concerned about economic modesty--that Christian women not flaunt their wealth through expensive clothes, braided hair and gold jewelry. Some readers might assume that Moses married "below himself" because his wife was a dark-skinned Cushite. Actually, Hebrews were the slave race, not the Cushites, who were highly respected. Aaron and Miriam probably thought Moses was being presumptuous by marrying "above himself." Western individualism leads us to assume that Mary and Joseph traveled alone to Bethlehem. What went without saying was that they were likely accompanied by a large entourage of extended family. Biblical scholars Brandon O'Brien and Randy Richards shed light on the ways that Western readers often misunderstand the cultural dynamics of the Bible. They identify nine key areas where modern Westerners have significantly different assumptions about what might be going on in a text. Drawing on their own crosscultural experience in global mission, 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. Getting beyond our own cultural assumptions is increasingly important for being Christians in our interconnected and globalized world. Learn to read Scripture as a member of the global body of Christ.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Whether rules over relationships or correctness over community, respective Western and non-Western worldviews may differ on appropriate conduct, discretion, and exceptions. Randolph and O'Brien write with grace and clarity. Though evangelical, they steer clear of moral or political agendas and give no hint of anti-Western sentiments; they even suggest someone write a complementary sequel: *Misreading Scripture with Eastern Eyes*. Their extensive range of biblical and contemporary samples makes this an excellent resource for confessional Bible study contexts or an entry-level textbook in undergraduate courses on biblical interpretation." (Martin W. Mittelstadt, *Religious Studies Review* 39, no. 2, June 2013)"Written in engaging prose, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes* is a must-have for students of the Bible, and especially students of biblical apologetics. Any seasoned traveler knows that when someone visits a foreign country for the first time, he or she will be well served by a competent guide. When it comes to the social world of the Bible, Richards and O'Brien serve as tour guides par excellence." (James Patrick Holding, *Christian Research Journal* 36, no. 5)"For many, [this] book will offer a dose of humility with hope. One is encouraged to admit, 'I don't know' while at the same time is 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." (Jackson Wu, *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, July 2013)"This is an outstanding treatment of a complex and important topic. . . . This would make a good textbook for courses in hermeneutics or biblical interpretation, cultural studies, prolegomena, or theological method, as well as small-group studies in a local church. The book is written at a level that educated laypeople as well as pastors, teachers, and scholars will find helpful." (Glenn R. Kreider, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, October-December 2013)"A politely confrontational book that bids you trade in your cultural spectacles and rethink how your worldview distorts your scriptural conclusions. Sex, money, food, self-focus, prejudices, and much more: developed with apt storytelling and enlightening examples." (Worship Leader Magazine, May 2013)"A fascinating guide for any serious Bible reader! *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes* reveals the 'habits of the mind' that might blind us to the Bible's intended message. Richards and O'Brien unpack the intricacies and nuances of cultural communication to help people better understand the Bible. To help you know--and live--the

Christian life more faithfully." (Nikki Toyama-Szeto, Urbana program director, coauthor of *Partnering with the Global Church*) "Richards and O'Brien open our eyes to the crosscultural nature of the Bible. Their book is a helpful resource in understanding Scripture on its own terms, without imposing our assumptions on the biblical authors and their first readers." (Lindsay Olesberg, author, *The Bible Study Handbook*, and senior associate for Scripture engagement, Lausanne Movement) "The authors of *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes* make a convincing case that those who trust in the Bible should (for biblical reasons) be more self-conscious about themselves. Their demonstration of how unself-conscious mores influence the understanding of Scripture is as helpful as the many insights they draw from Scripture itself. This is a good book for better understanding ourselves, the Christian world as it now exists and the Bible." (Mark A. Noll, Francis A. McAnaney Professor of History, University of Notre Dame, coauthor, *Clouds of Witnesses: Christian Voices from Africa and Asia*) "Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes is an important book that comes along at a critical moment in global evangelical history. Helpful examples reveal our cultural tendencies and biases that could hinder a deeper reading of Scripture. The authors help us to recognize our blind spots and offer insight that honors the intention of Scripture to be read in the context of community. I am grateful to the authors for their effort to be self-reflective and engage in a critical examination of our engagement with Scripture from within Western culture." (Soong-Chan Rah, Milton B. Engebretson Associate Professor of Church Growth and Evangelism at North Park Theological Seminary, author of *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity*) "This is a revolutionary book for evangelical Bible-believers. If its readers end the book motivated to ask the questions it invites and even inspired to identify other possible misreadings because of Western cultural blinders that have not been discussed, they will be more ready to live out the kind of biblically faithful, Christ-honoring and God-fearing lives that they desire to and that the world needs." (Amos Yong, J. Rodman Williams Professor of Theology, Regent University School of Divinity, Virginia) "Randy Richards and Brandon O'Brien have written a useful and enjoyable book, which makes excellent use of good stories to illustrate the points they make. The reader will leave the book with plenty of challenging questions to ask about approaches to Scripture. Interesting, thoughtful, and user-friendly." (Philip Jenkins, distinguished professor of history, co-director for the program on historical studies of religion, Institute for Studies of Religion, Baylor University, author of *The Next Christendom*)

E. Randolph Richards (PhD, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) is dean and professor of biblical studies in the School of Ministry at Palm Beach Atlantic University. He is a popular speaker

and has authored and coauthored dozens of books and articles, including *Paul Behaving Badly*, *A Little Book for New Bible Scholars*, *Rediscovering Jesus*, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes*, *Rediscovering Paul*, *The Story of Israel*, and *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*. Early on in their ministry he and his wife Stacia were appointed as missionaries to east Indonesia, where he taught for eight years at an Indonesian seminary. Missions remain on the hearts of Randy and Stacia. Randy leads mission trips and conducts missionary training workshops and regularly leads tours of the Holy Land, Turkey, Greece, and Italy. He has served as interim pastor of numerous churches and is currently a teaching pastor. He and Stacia reside in Palm Beach, Florida. Brandon J. O'Brien (PhD, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) is assistant professor of Christian theology at Ouachita Baptist University and director of OBU at New Life Church in Conway, Arkansas. He is coauthor, with E. Randolph Richards, of *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes* and *Paul Behaving Badly*, as well as the author of *The Strategically Small Church*. A senior editor for *Leadership Journal*, O'Brien has published in *Christianity Today*, *Relevant*, and the *Out of Ur* blog, and has been interviewed by and quoted in *USA Today* and other national newspapers.

This book is fantastic. I have worked cross culturally in Kenya for years and the insights of this book even go beyond the language of scripture. This book will be massively helpful for anyone evangelizing or discipling in another culture. In order to be effective cross culturally, it is so important to be able to see life through someone else eyes. This book will be a great start on that journey. The supernatural authorship of scripture comes through so powerfully as you begin to realize that the same scripture speaks intimately to an under educated believer as well as to a seasoned theologian and even though a differently nuanced message comes through to each, both messages are inspired. I am making it mandatory reading for our personnel in Africa.

This book will bring an necessary awareness of cultural values that effect our interpretation of scripture. It is a great start to a lifelong journey of identifying cultural features that greatly effect, and often distort, our understanding of scripture.

This is one of the most helpful books I've read in quite some time regarding how we read scripture. It is challenging to see how our culture affects what we read into the events of scripture, or fail to understand them at all. There are many things we overlook, things we overly consider, things we just apply in the incorrect manner because we miss the meaning of the original authors. It is not a comprehensive book. But it gives a great description of how all cultures have things that go unsaid...

and how things that went unsaid 2000 years ago are missed when we read them today. As well as the things we add into scripture, because we attempt to add the things that go unsaid in our culture where it doesn't belong. I can say this has helped me to examine myself and opens a long road of further examination.

Thought provoking but not particularly scholarly look at how our cultural assumptions differ from those of the people who wrote the Bible and for whom the Bible was written. I will read it with a different mindset now. That will be quite helpful.

Worth reading

One of the best reads in years. It is so difficult to identify behaviors that are part of our own culture and they're no more likely to be biblical than the behaviors we find strange in another culture. I'm considering buying a paper version to share around.

Fantastic book that breaks through our Western worldview to see the Bible in a new and informative light! Great read, the western church needs more books like these.

I am not sure if I agree about taking the "me" out of some scriptures.

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