



*Crossing Cultures in Scripture:
Biblical Principles for Mission
Practice*

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Missions Lessons for Today Gleaned from Crosscultural Encounters in Scripture

Crossing Cultures in Scripture is a biblical theology of culture, working canonically from Genesis to Revelation to understand and teach lessons from the major crosscultural stories and events of Scripture. Written by Marvin Newell, senior vice president of Missio Nexus and a former missionary and missions professor, this book is a unique blend of biblical exposition and contemporary mission application informed by real-life missionary experience. Students and practitioners of crosscultural ministry and mission will learn how God was at work in the crosscultural encounters of the biblical characters as well as how those lessons apply to missions today through “Crosscultural Insights” outlined in each chapter and a closing summary “Takeaway.”

The Bible is a book rich in cultures. Think for a moment of some of the cultures that have expression in Scripture: Hebrew, Chaldean, Egyptian, Ethiopian, Hittite, Mesopotamian, Syrian, Assyrian, Philistine, Canaanite, Moabite, Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman, to name most of them. Here’s the amazing part: God worked in and through his servants crossing through these cultures to bring his grand story of redemption to us.

The Bible is full of crosscultural encounters that have lessons for us today. An astounding number of biblical characters grew in their understanding of God, the world, and themselves through, as Nelson Jennings puts it, “getting lost” in the wilderness wanderings of crosscultural experience. Notable persons such as Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Ruth, David, Daniel, Jonah, Nehemiah, Jesus, Philip, Peter, Barnabas, and Paul stand out as individuals who worked their way through crosscultural contacts and experiences. Some, like Joseph, Daniel, and Paul, had prolonged experiences.

Thus it’s evident that there is much to learn from the cultural encounters found throughout Scripture and portrayed in the lives God used to unfold his redemptive story. The many accounts of individuals who crossed cultures as part of his design for their lives convey cultural lessons for us today that help inform our crosscultural encounters as well. The anecdotes and teachings throughout Scripture related to culture – from Genesis to Revelation, from Eden throughout eternity – should not be ignored. Indeed, they have an increasing value to us who live in an increasingly multicultural world and wish to study the art of crossing cultures as portrayed throughout Scripture.

When we take a focused look at Scripture through the lens of cultural understanding, three realities emerge:

- *The Bible is a portrayer of cultures.* It unashamedly depicts and describes, many times uncritically, how separate communities and whole societies lived out their beliefs, values, and customs – the very elements that define culture. Some aligned closely

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BOOK EXCERPT

“In this era of increasing globalization and multiculturalism, *Crossing Cultures in Scripture* provides a greatly needed biblical theology of culture. Newell weaves together biblical narratives and personal insights to present the Bible as a textbook for ministering and flourishing across cultures. The case studies of biblical figures who cross cultures address the main issues every missionary inevitably faces. If you are a Christian engaging the nations, this book is an ideal guide for you.”

– Jayson Georges, missionary, author, and founding editor of *HonorShame.com*

with divine-sanctioned standards and ideals, and others did not.

- *The Bible is a sculptor of cultures.* It helped shape and influence numerous cultures for the better. And it still does this today. Where Scripture is regarded as authoritative, many social evils embedded in the customs of communities have been either discontinued or adjusted to reflect standards of morality and social well-being God always intended for humans to enjoy.
- *The Bible is an appraiser of cultures.* Its supracultural values are meant to be the accepted moral standard for all cultures found everywhere through all time. No culture is exempt; no community of humans is excused. The standards and values of Scripture stand in judgment on any cultural practice or expression that ignores or opposes the divine values given therein. The objective norms and standards of Scripture trump the subjective and selective opinions of humans.

Thus we can see why it’s important to start with Scripture when seeking to understand the origin, nature, and dynamics of culture and crosscultural engagement. Crossing cultures is best experienced – and with a lot fewer embarrassing mistakes – when Scripture is acknowledged as the first and primary point of reference.

– Adapted from the preface and chapter one, “Introduction to Culture”