



The Culture Behind the Bible
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The three vital principles of Scriptural Interpretation:

- . Context
- . Context
- . **Context!**

Goals of the Series

- . Become sensitized to the concept of "social location"
- . Compare and contrast our social location to the social location of the biblical authors.
- . Understand the key values of AMC (Ancient Mediterranean Culture).
- . Understand the way in which these values played out in AMC.
- . Be able to identify cultural influences in the biblical narrative (i.e.its context) so as to come to a more culturally accurate interpretation of the biblical text.
- . Apply our (hopefully) more nuanced understanding of culture to contemporary issues.

Some Definitions:

- Social location: a collection of social demographics, such as race, economic class, gender, ability, sexual orientation, age, religion, geographic location. No two social locations are exactly alike, but generally shared over a broad swath of society.
- Culture: the sum of attitudes customs and beliefs that distinguish one group of human beings from another. Is transmitted through language, material objects, ritual, institutions, and art, from one generation to the next.

Some More Definitions:

- Social systems: the way we relate to one another. Four main areas:
 - Kinship: held together by commitment.
 - Economics: held together by the exchange of goods and services (commerce).
 - Politics: vertical organizational structure of society; held together by power; expressed in collective action.
 - Religion: overarching order and meaning of existence. held together by influence, commonly understood reasons for why things are the way they are.
- Ethnocentrism: judging another culture solely by the values and standards of one's own culture. It is a view that holds one's own culture as normative and the other as different. "Difference" usually seen as a negative.

Exercise: My Social Location

- Take a few minutes to jot down aspects of your social location: race, class, gender, ability, sexual orientation, age, religion, geographic location.
- How many of these are shared by most of the room?
- How can our social location lead us astray?

High Context vs Low Context Societies

- . What is assumed vs what is explicitly stated.
- . AMC is a high-context society. Why?
- . Contemporary US society is low-context. Why?
- . The peril of unexamined assumptions.

The Characteristics of AMC

- . Mainly an agrarian culture: tied to the land.
- . Rise of cities and the city-state.
- . Tension: Urban folks viewed as leeches by agrarian folks since they do not grow their food. Includes the temple elites.
- . Tension: Those who amass land resented by those who worked it (sharecroppers or slaves).
- . The four areas of social systems are much more intertwined than our own society.
- . Social systems operated locally, governed by relationships within the area.
- . Most importantly, it is a high-context society. Much is assumed.

Implications for Scriptural Interpretation

- . Very little cultural explanation in the Bible.
- . The earlier the writing, the greater the assumptions.
- . Dangers of re-contextualization.
 - . Ex: Jesus and the children. (Mark 10:13-16)
 - . Ex: The Widow's Mite. (Mark 12:41-44)


