



The New Testament in Cross-Cultural Perspective: (Matrix: The Bible in Mediterranean Context)

Richard L. Rohrbaugh

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The Bible is not a Western book, and the world of the New Testament is not our world. The New Testament world was preindustrial, Mediterranean, and populated mostly by nonliterate peasants who depended on hearing these writings read aloud. Only a few of the literate elite were part of the Jesus movement, and they knew nothing of either modernity or the Western culture we inhabit today. This means that for all North Americans, reading the New Testament is always an exercise in cross-cultural communication. Travelers, diplomats, and exchange students take great pains to bridge the cultural gaps that cloud mutual understanding. But North American readers habitually suspend cross-cultural awareness when encountering the Bible. The result is that we unwittingly project our own cultural understandings onto the pages of the New Testament. Rohrbaugh argues that to whatever degree we can bridge cultural gaps between ourselves and New Testament writers, we learn to value their intentions rather than the meanings we create from their words. Rohrbaugh's insightful interpretations of Gospel passages go a long way toward helping to span distances between the New Testament world and the present.

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