

History and Authenticity of the Bible
Lesson 23
Culture

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Father how thankful we are for Your wonderful grace and mercy to us. And thank You, Lord, for Your goodness. You tell us, "All things work together for good to those who love You and those who are called according to Your purpose" ([Romans 8:28](#)). We thank You for the privilege of studying about the Bible itself. You've honored Your word above Your name, which is very hard for us to understand that one. We realize this is the word of God. We don't make it the word of God. We realize it has power to change our lives. As we continue our discussion of interpreting this blessed Book, may we again understand that we have no right to private interpretation. That these holy men, chosen, separated by God for this task, were guided and directed and moved about by the Holy Spirit of God (cf. [2 Peter 1:20-21](#)). So that what was written was definitely what You wanted, fully trustworthy, totally reliable and accurate. Thank You, Lord. And we look forward to what we'll learn, in Jesus' name. Amen.

All right. Are we ready? Culture. What is culture? Some people think it's sophistication, but culture is critical to the interpretation of the Bible. To illustrate before I start with this, I have spent maybe ten to twelve hours this week alone on culture, to help me in teaching where I am in the book of Exodus. It took me a little longer because I'm not familiar with a lot of things that have happened since the last time I was in Exodus. So I want to upgrade my knowledge and find out what's going on. And much to my surprise there was so much that it was just, well it was really exciting. I love learning things about the Bible. Don't you? And it just seemed like there was no end to the blessing.

I bought a book that has recently come out by Josephus. And I'm not talking about the *Wars and Antiquities* that everybody knows about, but this is a commentary. And I looked at Josephus' commentary on Exodus and it was really interesting. A lot of facts that he brought out

that aren't in the Bible and as far as I'm concerned are not reliable either. He contradicted himself in the same page or two about facts dealing with the culture of ancient Egypt. And had literally numbers contradicting themselves in the same almost paragraph, at least on the same page. And it reminded me again of the importance of getting accuracy as you're looking at culture.

It was a joy to go over a lot of things about ancient Egypt. I spent a lot of time trying to figure out who that Pharaoh was that drowned in the Red Sea. All the updated stuff that we know has only confirmed what I felt previously. So the early date of the Exodus, which the biblical chronology points to, is in fact totally reliable with archaeological discovery. So that encourages me too. I have a real heart for this.

Now in regard to culture, there is a whole section of this that is not here. This is not a course in interpretation, but if I were doing a course on hermeneutics, the culture section here would go on for several pages. I would tell you about the cultures that you ought to be interested in and it would probably surprise you. For instance, you could hardly understand Genesis without understanding the Sumerian culture. S-U-M-E-R-I-A-N. When I went to college it was not the oldest civilization. They said the Egyptian was the oldest. Today, by archaeological discovery we know the oldest was the Sumerian culture, which was in the Mesopotamian Valley. Now, by that we mean, what has been uncovered. It doesn't mean that there isn't one previous to that. But this is all we know. The Sumerian culture is the one out of which Abraham came. And so learning about that gives us a lot of insights into the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

All of those things are valuable, but there are many cultures—the Assyrian, the Egyptian and all. And the longer you study them, the more you are aware of the fact that the Bible is quite accurate in how it pictures things. Things that you didn't see as culture really are. And so culture is important. But we don't mean what a lot of people do by the study of culture. They believe that somehow, we need to change or adapt the Bible to the current culture in which we live. We certainly want you to be contemporary and we believe the Bible is true in every generation and applicable in every generation. But that's not what we mean here by culture. We're talking about

the culture behind the facts of the Bible at the time it was written. And that's all the difference in the world. Sometimes, people say of the Bible, "Well, it's not culturally relevant—meaning maybe today. Even then its principles never change. So, you've got to substitute that which is cultural, that is, from the historical point in which it was written from that which is a moral principle in that story that applies to every generation. It's not easy to deal with this, believe me. But it's, very, very critical to our understanding of the Bible.

Pastor Chuck is a great student of culture and history. When he paints an Old Testament story, one of the things I like about it, before he really even examines the text is he lays out the whole history and background. What nations are in power and so on and so forth. And that type of stuff takes time to learn—doesn't it? It takes time to learn, study it, read about it. Get it under your belt so it's like second nature with you when you try to teach the Bible. Culture is an extremely important matter.

In addition to all the Assyrian and Babylonian and Persian and Greek cultures that parallel Bible times, one of the biggest items for study is the most neglected. If you can believe it, this is the biggest area of culture affecting the Bible and one that's most neglected. What do you think it is? That's exactly right, Jewish culture! Jewish culture is throughout the Scriptures. You can't really understand Old or New Testament without understanding Jewish culture. Yet that's one of the most neglected fields in the church today. We've almost paganized a lot of things in the New Testament. Put a Gentile view on it that came out of Greek mythology, not out of Jewish culture and understanding. Now there's more attention being given to this today than ever before. But it is a very critical matter, extremely critical.

Now let's just give you some basics, okay, so that we understand what we're talking about. The definition of culture is: "The ways, methods, the manners, the tools, the literary productions and institutions of any people." Therefore, I could adequately say to you "there is a Hittite culture." Would you agree with that? Why? It's a people mentioned in the Bible, the Hittites. There is a Philistine culture. It's a people mentioned in the Bible. Now, at the turn of the

century, we hardly knew anything about the Hittites. But we now know it was one of the biggest empires in the ancient world. It covered all of Turkey down to Syria, constantly effecting Israel. And so it all of a sudden adds a lot of things. There are books you can buy on the Hittites in biblical history. You can read about them. You can do the same about Philistines.

Sometimes the culture of a given people in the land of Israel has roots in another culture, which adds to your understanding. Let me give you an example. In the land of Israel we have the Gaza Strip. We have cities in the Gaza Strip and also in Israel that are known as the Philistine cities. There are five major ones mentioned in the Bible. Gath and Ekron and Ashkelon and Ashdod, so forth. We have those cities mentioned in the Bible.

Now at an excavation in Ashkelon, there was a tremendous find not too many years ago. They found a perfectly preserved bull or calf in solid silver from ancient times. Now the reason why this was so critical, in fact it's being used by the Palestinians and PLO today to prove that they were in Israel before Abraham was, which they probably were, and they're proving by *a priori* right that Israel belongs to them (the Palestinians) not to Israel. That's a very heavy-duty discussion in the peace process.

This little artifact, this little all silver bull, became very critical to the discussion relating to this culture. Why? Because it matches in artwork what's on the Island of Crete at the Minoan civilization. And it proves what many people have long felt, that the Minoan civilization that were seafaring people, literally are the ancient ancestors of the Philistines who settled along the Mediterranean coast. And the fact is they probably were there before Abraham. By the general term "the Canaanite was in the land" (cf. [Genesis 12:6](#)), when Abraham came there was a generation, a culture of people, in the land of Israel before Abraham ever arrived. No, the issue of who owns that land or who it belongs to is based on divine edict not on cultural presence. God said, "This land is Mine and I'm going to give it to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (cf. [Exodus 33:1](#)). So it's a biblically divine right that gives Israel that land. And no other

reason is going to ever solve this problem in the Middle East. Everything else is going to be a big up-for-grabs issue. It's going to be a serious problem. That's why it's still serious.

See it's interesting, but one of the things that I enjoyed about going to the Island of Crete was examining the Minoan civilization because I see how that paganism through the Philistines came in there. And I see the things now that are mentioned in the Old Testament and they all of a sudden take on a new light. We get more understanding because of it. And you're going to find, though this is one of the difficult areas of Bible study, it's one of the most needed to give you an adequate explanation of things. For instance: the god Molech, and offering children to Molech, and all of that, to understand what that is all about is extremely vital to understanding God's judgment upon Israel for following those abominations. Every culture that's there adds to our learning.

There are so many things that are over there that are mentioned in our Bibles that, you know, if you're not exposed to it and you don't see it you don't quite understand what's going on. All of this is valuable to Bible study. But what I want you to see is that every culture ever mentioned in the Bible with any detail regarding it has only been confirmed by archaeological discovery, never contradicted; which if you think about it, is an amazing testimony to the accuracy and reliability of the Bible. Because that's almost unheard of! How in the world that could have taken place when the books were written over 1500 years is remarkable indeed! How in the world they would even be exposed to one another culturally and give accurate information is another amazing thing. So, this whole subject is critical.

Culture is best understood, in terms of accuracy, by archaeology. Culture is best understood, in terms of accuracy, understanding what you're talking about, by archaeology. Archaeology—*Archae*, it's archaic. It's old, ancient. It's the study of old things. Particularly, archaeology is the study of ancient cultures. This is done by taking a hill or a mound or a mountain, which in fact is just one city built upon another. It's stratification or layers clearly

reveal that. And it is studying the cultural factors in each level, which determine what culture it is, what time period it is and factors such as coins.

I'm going to try to illustrate as much as I can because I don't want anybody to be confused here about what we're talking about. We know that Bethsaida from which some disciples came on the Sea of Galilee, which has now been totally excavated, now is open to the public. We know that it was *not* a Greek city. This has been a...well I'd say a shock! We thought that Bethsaida was a part of the Greek Decapolis around the Sea of Tiberius. For years I preached it so. We now know that Bethsaida was a Hebrew town and village, Hebrew coinage, Hebrew culture, everything in it. And that has really kind of shocked archaeological thinking about the time of Jesus. So we realized that Hebrew culture and Hebrew language was much more dominant than anyone has ever argued before.

We used to say something like this: "The primary language and culture was Aramaic that came from ancient Babylon and Persia when the Jews returned to the land." They probably spoke Aramaic. We argued that Jesus and His disciples spoke Aramaic. And that the Hellenists are those who have adapted to the Greek culture which the Romans of course imposed upon Israel.

Now we are finding, also by recent discoveries from Dead Sea Scroll material by the way, that probably Hebrew was the language of the Jewish people, even though they might have spoken Greek or had knowledge of Aramaic. They spoke Hebrew. They were actually deliberately trying to restore their own culture in the midst of this pressure from Rome to do otherwise. Now we believe that Jesus and His disciples spoke Hebrew and not Aramaic.

It used to be said, "Well there are so many Aramaic words in the Bible. That has to be a Babylonian—Persian background." They would use such statements as on the cross, *Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachthani*. You know, all those terms. *Maranatha! Talitha cumi*, "My daughter arise." But we now know those are not Aramaic, they are Hebrew.

Do you remember when Jesus said on the cross, *Eloi, Eloi Sabachthani*? When He said that on the cross, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me," they said: "He's calling for

Elijah.” Do you remember that? If it was Aramaic, no one would have suspected He was calling for Elijah. But if it was Hebrew, they would suspect that. Why?—because the Hebrew would be *Eli, Eli. Elohim* is God—*El*, the shortened form. The little *i* on the end is the possessive for my. My God, My God. *Eli* is also the Jewish abbreviation of Elijah. So you see, if it were said in Hebrew, which we believe it was, then that explains something in the text that you can’t explain any other way—why they thought He was calling for Elijah. He wasn’t. He was calling out “My God, My God. Why hast Thou forsaken Me?”

Now where do you get that knowledge? Where do you get that understanding? It depends on whether you understand culturally what is happening. What conclusions you draw. And for years in church history, all the way up to the present century, we have ignored Jewish culture to the point we thought it was a Greek Hellenistic environment so we interpreted everything that way.

For years in commentaries, they would take a phrase like *the Son of God* and give it a Greek understanding. No More. They did the same thing with *Son of Man*. But we now know that Son of Man was an official title of the Messiah, not only mentioned in [Daniel 7:13-14](#), but it’s everywhere throughout messianic writings by Jewish rabbinical scholars. So we know that a little cultural understanding, a little knowledge is going to open up a lot of things in the Bible you wouldn’t see any other way.

Here’s another eye opener. Every parable that Jesus told, every one that is recorded, is all found among rabbinical sayings among the Talmud or the Mishnah. Every one of them! There’s not a new one there. Now that’s an eye opener, because then you can begin to look at the Jewish culture as to how that was interpreted, you begin to understand a little bit more. If you want to see some of this, it can become almost comical. “It’s easier for a camel to go through the eye of the needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” ([Matthew 19:24](#)). Many rabbis said that. Jesus was simply pointing out to them what they already knew. The meaning is impossible. He’s

talking about the eye of a weaver's needle. We find it's a hyperbole, an exaggeration, meaning that you're not going to make it.

So all this cultural understanding is vital to us. Remember the Old Testament especially is filled with multi-cultural settings. Israel was coming in contact with the nations of the world. And what we have done for years is paid no attention to it. But what a culture is affects what is being said by the Lord, to all the nations of the world.

So, what is culture again? It's best understood in its accuracy by archaeology. It deals with the ways, methods, manners, tools, literary productions and institutions of any people.

Now class, if you need to underline something, I'd underline literary productions. You rarely find them, but when you do, what an eye opener! Can you imagine digging in some dig and finding actually on a clay tablet or something some actual writing in an ancient language? Now we have a lot of this assimilated in books today and it's helpful, very helpful. That can also be of New Testament times. For example, wouldn't it be interesting to know how words that are used in the New Testament are used in non-biblical material? Sure it would.

When Paul wrote in [Ephesians 1:14](#) that the Holy Spirit is the "earnest of our inheritance," the Greek word *arrabōn* is very interesting when you go back to the first century and see in other writings how *arrabōn* is used. It refers to an engagement ring. Now right away we have a new slant, don't we, on what that passage meant. By the way, in this case, not only did it mean that in the first century, you're still using that today in Greece for the engagement ring. So here's a word that's remained consistent throughout history, yet we've been using it over and over again as a deposit and a down payment. And that can just add wonderful thoughts to your mind that the Holy Spirit is like an engagement ring guaranteeing that I'm going to be married in the future to Jesus Christ and receive all of the inheritance. What a wonderful, wonderful promise that is! And it adds to your understanding. Where did you get that from? You got it from culture. By examining the literary productions of any people the way, the methods, the manners, the tools.

When I came to Daniel 11 years ago, I heard all kinds of arguments about what Daniel 11 was about—trying to figure out what was going on there. Verse by verse kings are changing and different facts are given. All along the Aswan Dam are all these ancient structures of ancient kings, beautiful archaeological discoveries, huge palaces and buildings all from the time period of Daniel chapter 11. There were cultural factors that were found in there that completely substantiate Daniel 11. I assimilated all that material and what a joy that was because I found out that Daniel 11 verse by verse, phrase by phrase, is exactly accurate with the history of the battles between the Ptolemys and Seleucids, the break up of Alexander the Great's empire, fighting over Israel. What an insight! Bringing you all the way down to Antiochus Epiphanies, who becomes a historical symbol of the antichrist himself. And when you read all of that, I mean, my heart leaps for joy! I already believe this book is the word of God. I wish the whole world knew all of this.

Culture is not a subject to put on your shelf and never look at again. So if you're in an old bookstore and you see some old books on Egypt or Syria or Babylon, flip through them. There may be some history, there may be some value—pick it up. Put it in your library. You'd be amazed at what you can learn. A lot of people don't pay any attention to those books. That's why they're in our old bookstores. They don't want them any more. Culture is so important. Many, many times the coins and tools alone tell us what period of time it is.

Cultural Factors

Four basic cultural areas that can assist with biblical interpretation

- 1) Geography – location, elevation, travel, wars, etc.
- 2) Politics – kings, rulers, governments, taxation, etc.
- 3) Customs – traditions, foods, clothing, coinage, etc.
- 4) Religion – Judaism, Christianity, Pantheism, Paganism

Now there are four basic factors—and this you should know—the four basic factors of cultural understanding, of anybody’s culture. One is geography. Boy is that important! Did they go up or down? We always go up to Jerusalem. Why, because it’s up! We always go down to Jericho. Why, because it’s down 1300 feet below sea level. Do you understand? It’s just amazing. When you see a picture of the ancient fortress of Masada, you say, boy that’s really up there. You forget the fact that the top of Masada is sea level.

There are a lot of interesting things geographically. There’s a difference between the high plateau of Galilee or the Golan Heights and the hills of Samaria. You can see how Abraham on a clear day can stand on Mount Nebo and literally see the entire land of Israel, all the way to Mount Hermon, all the way to the Mediterranean Sea, all the way down to Beersheba. The exact thing God said is true. He (Abraham) could see the entire land (cf. [Deuteronomy 32:49](#)). So geography is vital. It’s absolutely vital to everything. Do you understand Paul’s shipwreck? Do you understand that voyage he made to Rome? I tell you when you know geography and you know

what actually happens you know why he went the way he did and why he had the wreck he did.

It's interesting, just to see all of that and understand that.

Number two is politics. Politics is crucial to culture. What king is in power? What are the actual facts? Let me give one where culture can really help you. In Luke chapter two, it says that "There went out from Caesar Augustus a decree that all the world should be taxed or registered." And this census took place when Quirinius was governor of Syria (cf. [Luke 2:2](#)). Now by studying culture, I learn that there were three empire-wide taxations that were called for by Caesar Augustus. I know that number one and number three cannot possibly be the dating of the birth of Christ—not even close, give or take ten years. So, it has to be number two.

Now I also know the problem of Quirinius because at the time when that taxation took place Quirinius was not the governor of Syria. When I went to school they did everything under the sun to explain this to me. They said, "Well, I think Quirinius ruled Syria a couple of times." I never found that to be true. Do you understand? Do you have an inquiring mind? Inquiring minds want to know. Do you want to know the truth? Do you? I want to know the truth. I don't want somebody snowing me [giving false facts] about it. So I'm looking at this and I'm thinking, "Wait, what's going on here?" And so the Bible appears to be inaccurate. It's not close to anything—and I'm thinking: "Oh great, one glaring contradiction!"

Well, that's why a little Roman history is good. I don't know if you've ever read Roman history. It's interesting just to look at all the Roman emperors and see what happened. Well, as I was looking at the time that is under discussion in Luke 2, I noticed that in the Roman annals Quirinius was not governor at that time Varus was. V-A-R-U-S. But guess what else I found? I found that Quirinius was head of foreign policy and that Varus made him over all his troops and handling all the relationships with foreign powers. It got me thinking. So I turned back to Luke 2, looked at the Greek text one more time, and realized that it didn't say governor at all. It's a verb. It's not a noun. It says, "when Quirinius was *governing* Syria," which exactly was the truth. No, he wasn't the governor, Varus was. But he was ruling and governing in Varus's place.

The Bible is very detailed in its grammatical form was totally accurate to what we know that cultural understanding had proven. So, you understand? It's important. It affects many, many things that you and I study in the Bible.

Did you know that the names of people and political leaders mentioned in the book of Acts, for instance, including all the priests that we have a lot of information in non-biblical sources about all of them? And what an eye opener! You begin to understand things you never saw before. So politics alone is crucial.

Customs. What are the customs of these people? You can't understand John 13 without understanding customs. Jesus washing the feet of the disciples was a break with tradition and custom and that's what makes that story so powerful, once you understand how things actually took place. And by the way, did they sit on chairs while they did it? No. Because the Greek text tells us they were reclining, just like we learned, that's the way people ate in ancient times. The central table has the food on it and you lay on a couch, leaning on one hand. And with your other hand reach the food and eat it. Now it makes sense how John could easily lean back on Jesus, leaning on His breast. You see there are so many things.

Now we understand because of the courtyards in which these gatherings were that often people would hang around there from the community and the town. We could understand how that woman came in off the street and could sit at the feet without interrupting the conversation at the table and wash His feet and wipe them with her hair. It all begins to make sense when you understand customs of the people. And that I think is crucial, crucial to us.

When I look at archaeology and I see on walls, figures of men with beards, and I think they are probably not Egyptians because they shaved. Remember in Joseph's day? They required Joseph to shave before he even appeared before Pharaoh. And these beards represent either Jewish people or another culture who also wore beards. All of this is helpful to us and it's fascinating.

I remember walking through the Temple of Carnac in Luxor, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Ten men with their hands outstretched around the pillars of those can barely touch their ends of their fingers—that's how huge it is. Gigantic! Rows and rows of these giant pillars, these giant lions in the entry way, it's spectacular beyond belief! We were in there and the Egyptian guide is telling us about a lot of things and I mentioned to the guide, "You know, it's interesting to see all the comparison with biblical history."

And she looked at me and said, "There isn't anything here that tells you about any biblical history." She proceeded to tell me the late view of the Exodus in Ramses period and all that.

I said, "Excuse me? On a wall of this temple is the whole story of Shishak the time of Rehoboam."

She said, "That's not true."

I said, "Oh, yes it is!"

She said, "Where?"

I said, "Well, it's not where we are. So anyway, we go over and on the wall, the southern wall of this Temple of Karnak there engraved in there is the whole story of Shishak's invasion mentioned in the Bible. She's hunting her guidebook, flipping through all of that. And I said to her, "You know there's a major reason why nothing's in your guidebook."

She said, "Why? It's an Egyptian guidebook."

I said, "If modern Egypt does not put Israel on the map, can you not understand that ancient Egypt wouldn't mention either anything about Israel ever being here?"

She said, "No more!"

By the way, we had a big service of praise and I preached a little bit. I wasn't going to let the opportunity go by. But you understand that culture, customs, politics, all of that is fundamental.

Now also, the fourth basic factor is religion. And that comes into play big-time in the Bible. But all the way through the plagues of Egypt, the Egyptian pantheon, the paganism of Egypt was being attacked by all ten plagues. I mentioned all the gods that were being attacked, the names of them, what they represented, and all of a sudden the story comes alive to people. Well, culture is helpful.

When you study the religious system of Egypt, you all of a sudden realize what was happening there. God was literally smashing everything the Egyptians believed in, tearing it completely apart, specifically and clearly so that no one would have any mistake. Remember God said He was going to show His power over all the gods of Egypt. That's exactly what He did. And then He continues to mention it in all the rest of the Bible to remind us never to forget what God did there. He is the only God. He is above all gods that people come up with.

So it's interesting when you study all of the religious backgrounds, even the religious backgrounds of Jews. How many of you have ever really studied the Pharisees, and the Saducees, the Herodians and all that? Have you ever really studied it or have you just read a sentence of two? Let me tell you something, if you read about the Pharisees in detail, you will teach differently the story of the Pharisees in the Bible. Did you know there are still Pharisees today? I'm not talking about the coinage Pharisical, meaning hypocritical. I'm talking about actual Pharisees that are still here today. They call themselves Pharisees.

There's a wonderful book called *The Hidden Pharisees* by Elvis Rifkin, who is a part of ordaining council of rabbis in this country. And it's an excellent book. But you get a whole different understanding of who the Pharisees are. They were the most respected and religious people of their day. They were orthodox. They held a high view of inspiration and inerrancy of the Scripture. And they were sincere, but they were sincerely wrong. They were protectors of God's law. They were protectors of many, many things, even during the Roman invasion and attack on Jerusalem in A.D.70.

It's interesting when you see the background, when you understand the religious situation, it's fascinating how these religious parties even arise. How they became a part of the Sanhedrin, which was a Roman governmental situation. It wasn't set up by the Jewish Orthodox people at all, like Christians have taught for years. The Sanhedrin is a Roman puppet government. The Jews by the way, had their own, called the *Boule*, which is a Greek word for council. And these men were loyal to the Scriptures. It's just interesting when you see things in their proper cultural perspective and understanding. It never contradicts the Bible. It just opens and explains things that you never saw before. And that's why I just emphasize it over and over again.

However, people have gotten so messed up studying culture that I decided at least in this brief discussion, we need to lay some rules down. In a course on hermeneutics I have multiple rules that go on and on. But these are the four basic things to know when you come to the study of cultural understanding of the Bible.

Cultural Interpretation

Remember when interpreting a given culture:

- 1) Don't treat cultural factors as moral absolutes!
- 2) Don't use cultural factors alone to determine the interpretation!
- 3) Don't confuse cultural factors with the application of biblical principles!
- 4) Don't ignore cultural factors in your understanding!

Number one: Don't treat cultural factors as moral absolutes! They are helpful to our understanding, but it doesn't mean that they are a moral absolute. That's very important when Jesus teaches. Do you remember what they said about Him? "He teaches as one having authority and not as the scribes." What do they mean by that? Well, we know by understanding how the scribes taught. The number one way you teach, in fact you are required to teach, is never to authoritatively state a position yourself. You always quote other scholars. That's a sign of your humility and your respect for other scholarship.

Do you know that rabbis today do the same thing in the synagogue, or when they're even counseling you? You bring up a problem to them and they'll say, "Over here in Roshe, he said this about that. And Rabon said this, you know." And a lot of people are kind of confused over that kind of teaching. But that's rabbinical teaching. They refer to other scholars. They quote other people. Jesus didn't bother to do that, He just flat out puts His finger on the problem and tells them. And they said, "He teaches like one having authority, like He's the original source!" Right, He is! Do you understand? That passage all of a sudden opens up to you and you realize, because you know how the scribes taught, what is actually taking place there. Don't treat cultural factors as moral absolutes.

Number two: Don't allow cultural factors alone to determine the interpretation, because it may or may not be a factor! It may be helpful to your understanding, but it may not be the point of what Jesus was saying. Why do I say that?—because frequently He is saying things against the culture. He is attacking the culture. He is not commending it and that's important. That's also true about Paul. He's attacking the culture. So be careful. Don't use cultural factors to determine the interpretation.

Number three: Try not to confuse cultural factors with the application of biblical principles! I've seen this happen, where I hear a guy teaching and he is applying what is a cultural factor and it isn't necessarily what the biblical principle is. So we have to separate those two. That's true in symbolic language, which we're going to study here in just a moment. That's true

in symbolic language. You need to know what the difference is between the symbol and the truth that we are to apply; otherwise, you are applying the wrong thing.

And number four: Don't ignore cultural factors in your understanding! That's so easy to do. Here's what I do when I study a passage, I always just look through. Are there any nations, any cultures here that I need to study that would effect the interpretation of this passage? Sometimes there is not, but often I find, especially in the Old Testament, there is. And taking the time to look that up will always be beneficial to you. It may not be anything you're going to use, but it will help you to understand what's taking place there. That's very important.

When you ask about good books on culture, there are so many you don't know where to start. Sometimes you will find in the Christian bookstores, they'll have it in the historical section. They'll have history, archaeology, and sometimes lumped together. You will find a lot of the Bible dictionaries try to give you some of them. For instance, *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Encyclopedia*, they try to update theirs every couple of years, they upgrade it so new information that's been uncovered is in there. So sometimes your encyclopedias bring a lot of that information.

I like, personally, a given book on a given nation. That helps me. Now in the case of Egypt, because there's so much material, you've got old kingdom, middle kingdom, new kingdom, and you've got to decide what period of time you want to study. So I've got a parade of books on Egypt. And it doesn't matter whether they are secular or sacred. The basic facts that people learn from archaeological discovery are there. I prefer if it's an evangelical scholar, but not always is it. But I'd say if you see a book on a culture that's mentioned in the Bible, just flip through it. There may be some information that is helpful.

In Jewish culture there's lots of stuff. I would say buy everything Alfred Edersheim writes because his books are just filled with Jewish culture. It's not just *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, but he's got a lot of books. Emil Schurer has a set on Judaism in the First Century that's just absolutely vital to your understanding. But there are lots of them. If you really want to

get into heavy expenditure in this area, of course, *The Encyclopedia Judaica* series and that has everything you want to know about Jewish history and culture.

Interestingly when you get secular books, when people ask about Jewish culture, I recommend simply *The Jewish Book of Why*. It comes in two volumes and you can buy it in the secular bookstore. *The Jewish Book of Why*. And what you do is any question like: why do they use matzo bread? Why do they have a cloth? Why do they have bells at the end of this? All this kind of stuff and there are little brief synopsis of what the rabbinical scholars have taught on that—a lot of cultural understanding there. Then you can go to Jewish organizations like Friends of Israel, Jews for Jesus, Beth Sar Shalom, a lot of organizations put out books helping you with Jewish culture and understanding. But I get most of my stuff on other nations just out of secular bookstores. I have a lot on Rome because I majored in that area, so I have a lot on Rome. And it's helpful in understanding the Bible, boy, that's for sure!

Yes?

Another voice: "Do you recommend *Manners and Customs in Bible Times*?"

David: Yes, that's a real good book. There are a lot of books, class. You know, not all of us are going to be that kind of a person. I don't know what the Lord's going to do in your life. But I think just a little sampling helps us all. Maybe get a book or two on manners and customs. That would be helpful. It discusses things like tools and coinage and all of that. And you get an understanding of why that's so important. Pottery is another thing.

We know for instance in a Jewish wedding process, the engagement is always announced at the bridegroom's home. He takes his fiancé there and introduces her to his parents and they announce the engagement. And it takes a divorce to break up a Jewish engagement. A year later you always have it at the bride's home, and of course the bride's parents are either at their home or they rent a hall, they are responsible to pay for it. We still do that today of course even among Gentiles. That's why we think the wedding supper is on earth, see, one of the reasons.

Okay. Take a break.