

## “Where do I begin?” Recommended Reading List

For most people, the barrier which hinders them from going deeper into the Bible is an understanding of the larger *cultural context* within which the text was written. These are the things unsaid, or unexplained, that the original audience would have naturally understood. The understanding resides in their cultural (also socio- and political) context, not just in the surface words on the page.

This is no easy task but one that is well worth the undertaking as it provides the means for the Biblical text comes to life.

The biblical texts exist in a time/space continuum which in many ways is vastly different than the modern western world we live in. If you’ve spent any time in a foreign country you know how different the culture and customs can be from our own. There is a lot of ground to cover but it is doable and ultimately enjoyable for many lay people today. Here are some cultural contextual differences:

	<u>Modern Westerners</u>	<u>1<sup>st</sup> Century Jewish</u>
<b>Time:</b>	Post-Enlightenment	Ancient (Ancient Near East)
<b>Space:</b>	Western (Greek influence moved west)	Eastern (east of Greece)
<b>Thinking:</b>	Greek (abstract)	Hebrew (symbols/concrete)
<b>Communication:</b>	Low Context	High Context

Here are five books to serve as a foundational starting point. From these books you will be able to branch out with a basic understand of the cultural context of the scriptures.

1. *Epic of Eden: A Christian Entry into the Old Testament* - Sandra Richter  
\*\*the companion DVD set of Dr. Richter teaching is a very good addition.
2. *Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus: How the Jewishness of Jesus can Transform Your Faith*  
Ann Spangler and Lois Tverberg  
\*\* Lois Tverberg has a number of other books which are quite accessible for beginners.
3. *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels*, Kenneth Bailey  
\*\* Kenneth Bailey has several excellent books exploring eastern culture
4. *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith*, Marvin Wilson  
\*\* This was one of the first book I purchased on understanding the cultural context of the New Testament. It has been an indispensable resource over the past 18 years.
5. *Jewish Annotated New Testament*, Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler