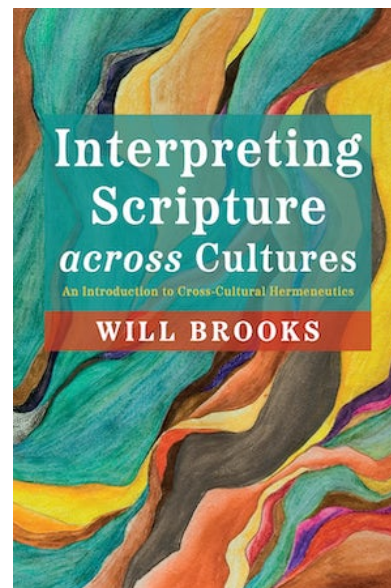


**Brooks, Will. *Interpreting Scripture Across Cultures: An Introduction to Cross-Cultural Hermeneutics*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2022.**

Reviewed by Jon Staples, IMB Field Personnel, North Africa and Middle East.

In *Interpreting Scripture across Cultures*, Will Brooks provides a survey on the topic of biblical interpretation for those doing ministry in cross-cultural environments. Brooks has extensive experience in this area as he teaches New Testament interpretation at two seminaries in Asia and has done so for over ten years. Therefore, Brooks writes as a scholar-practitioner who has thought deeply about the topic while on the ground helping others learn how to interpret the Bible.

On the field, missionaries are certain to run into surprising approaches to reading and interpreting the Bible. Some may say that the Bible has no set meaning. Others will say that the meaning of the Scriptures changes in various cultures around the world. Others will argue that culture and context play no role in the process of understanding the Scriptures. In this book, Brooks argues that “in every context” our goal as readers of the Bible should be to “understand the original author’s meaning” (14). He does this by examining the challenges presented by cross-cultural interpretation and the various views scholars have proposed, and then he presents a way forward with an author-oriented approach that can be applied in any context.



It is hard to overstate the importance of the topic of biblical interpretation for the missionary. As field workers seek to carry out the missionary task in their various contexts around the world, they must faithfully interpret the Scriptures. This is important not only for the missionaries themselves, but also for those whom they hope to train to be leaders and disciples who interpret the Bible faithfully and are teaching others to do the same. Faithful interpretation is crucial for the churches they leave behind. Brooks points out that how believers interpret Scripture “affects every single area of church health” (2). In other words, you cannot have a healthy church without healthy biblical interpretation. Therefore, this topic is crucial for all missionaries. Yet many cross-cultural workers may be tempted to fall into one of two ditches. Some may be more focused on faithfully interpreting the Scriptures to get the meaning of the text right while neglecting contextualization. On the other hand, some missionaries are more focused on considering their context, wanting to communicate the gospel well in a relevant and understandable way while neglecting careful interpretation of the Scriptures. Brooks helps balance these two tendencies showing that both careful biblical interpretation and faithful contextual consideration can and should be done well.

*Interpreting the Scriptures across Cultures* has many strengths. One that readily sticks out is the emphasis on training indigenous interpreters of the Bible. Brooks shows that the goal is to equip all believers in every context to interpret the Bible themselves as opposed to only giving them theological truths. Brooks encourages missionaries then to both “lead them to the Scriptures” and “give them solid interpretation skills” (25). Another strength of the book is that it is filled with both depth and practicality. For example, Brooks gives ten helpful principles for interpreting the Bible across cultures (chapter 10). He then builds on those principles by showing the reader how these ten principles can be practiced with four passages of Scriptures and a specific cultural context (chapter 11).

One final strength the reader will note is the value of humility in biblical interpretation. This is evident throughout the book. Brooks urges interpreters to pursue humility, read the Scriptures in community, and consider that they have much to learn from others. This value is vital as missionaries seek to serve across cultures.

Some readers may be tempted to skip or glaze over section two, which covers different views on cross-cultural hermeneutics. However, these chapters are not to be missed. As cross-cultural workers seek to partner with others in the missionary task, they will no doubt come across various views on how the Scriptures should be interpreted. While surveying these various views, Brooks points out the strengths and weaknesses of each view. I personally found these chapters helpful and enriching for my own views of how culture and biblical interpretation interact.

For missionaries who are working for God's glory to see healthy churches among the unreached peoples and places of the world, biblical interpretation is a crucial topic to consider. This book is unique in that it covers both faithful interpretation *and* careful contextualization. While you will find many books that cover one of these topics, I know of no other book that marries these topics as well as this one. For the sake of healthy biblical interpretation among all peoples and places, I commend this book to you.