



Becoming
Biblically
Literate

Take the Bible on Its Own Terms

Genesis 12:1-3

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Dave Lomas

Genesis 12:1-3

The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.

“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you;

I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

Take the Bible on its own terms.

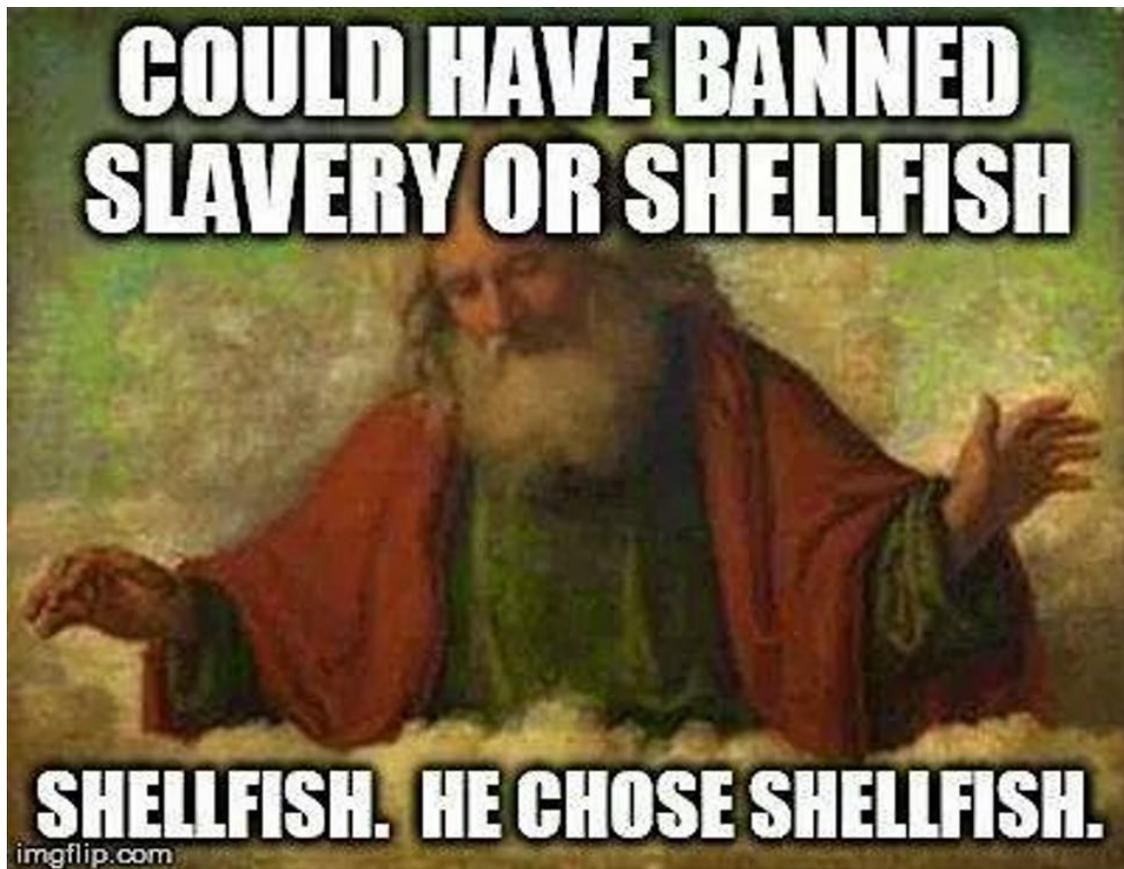
“If I—as a white Christian male—were to take elements of someone else’s culture and use them for my own purposes, they would call it ‘cultural appropriation.’ But if I take the ancient writings of the Bible and change them

to fit my purposes with no regard for the intent [and context] with which they were written, they call me 'enlightened' and 'evolved.' How could this be?"

- AJ Swoboda, *After Doubt: How to Question Your Faith Without Leaving It*

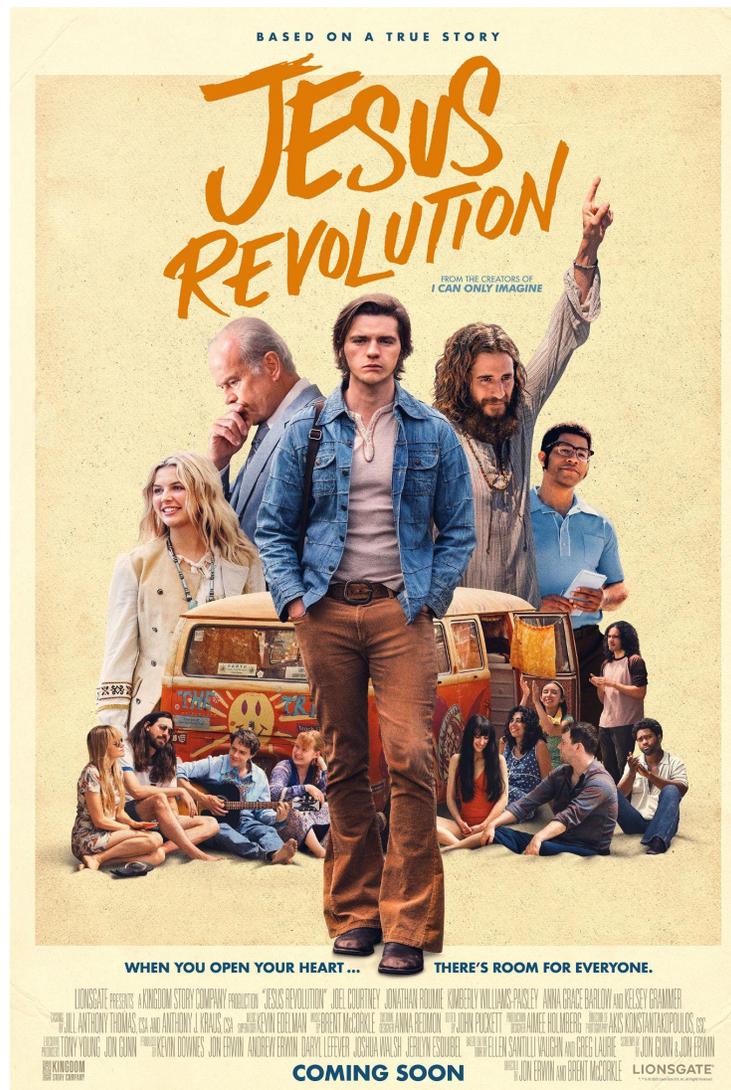
The Bible is a library of writings, both human and divine, that together tell a unified story that leads us to Jesus.

What does it mean that the Bible is "human?"



Exodus 1:14

They made their lives bitter with harsh labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their harsh labor the Egyptians worked them ruthlessly.



“[The Bible] is a swarming compost of a book, an Irish stew of poetry and propaganda, law and legalism, myth and murky history and hysteria. Over the centuries it has become hopelessly associated with tub-thumping evangelism and dreary piety, with superannuated superstition and blue-nosed moralizing, with ecclesiastical authoritarianism and crippling literalism...And yet just because it is a book about both the sublime and the unspeakable, it is a book also about life and the way it really is. It is a book about people who at one and the same time can be both believing and unbelieving, innocent and guilty, crusaders and crooks, full of hope and full of despair. In other words, it is a book about us.”

- Frederick Buechner

The Bible is written for us but it wasn't written to us.

“We believe the Bible was written for us, that it's for everyone of all times and places because it's God's Word. But it wasn't written to us. It wasn't written in our language; it wasn't written with our culture in mind or our culture in view.”

- John Walton

“I have a problem with the Bible. Here's my problem...I'm an ancient Egyptian. I'm a comfortable Babylonian. I'm a Roman in his villa. That's my problem. See, I'm trying to read the Bible for all it's worth, but I'm not a Hebrew slave suffering in Egypt. I'm not a conquered Judean deported to Babylon. I'm not a first century Jew living under Roman occupation. I'm a citizen of a superpower. I was born among the conquerors. I live in the empire. But I want to read the Bible and think it's talking to me. This is a problem. One of the most remarkable things about the Bible is that in it we find the narrative told from the perspective of the poor, the oppressed, the enslaved, the conquered, the occupied, the defeated. This is what makes it prophetic. We know that history is written by the winners. This is true—except in the case of the Bible it's the opposite! This is the subversive genius of the Hebrew prophets. They wrote from a bottom-up perspective.”

- Brian Zahnd

1 Kings 10:6-9

She said to the king, “The report I heard in my own country about your achievements and your wisdom is true. But I did not believe these things until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half was told me; in wisdom and wealth you have far exceeded the report I heard. How happy your people must be! How happy your officials, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom! Praise be to the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel. Because of the LORD's eternal love for Israel, he has made you king to maintain justice and righteousness.”

“The reason for our confusion [over the Bible] is that we usually read the Bible as a series of disconnected stories, each with a ‘moral’ for how we should live our lives. It is not. Rather, it comprises a single story, telling us how the human race got into its present condition, and how God through Jesus Christ has come and will come to put things right.”

- Tim Keller, *Counterfeit gods*

