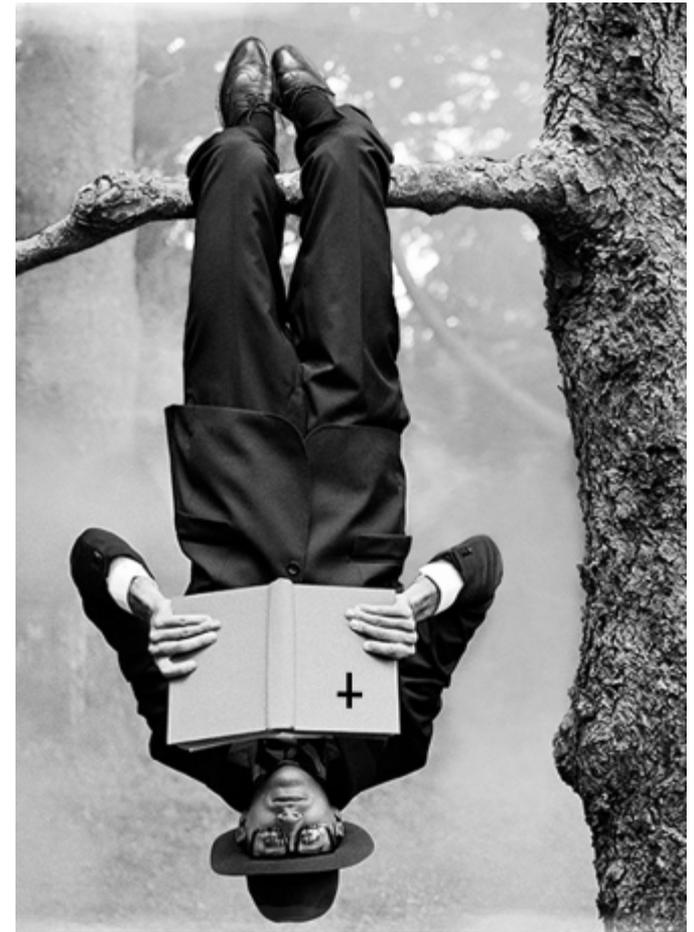


How to read the Bible really badly

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Bristol Baptist College



CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF
**BIBLE &
VIOLENCE**



BRISTOL
BAPTIST COLLEGE

The Bible is clear to every reader! What God is saying to me is made clear by the Holy Spirit as I read the Bible.



No, you have to learn Greek and Hebrew and study deeply to understand the Bible properly.

What does this verse mean ~~to you?~~

Some definitions

- Exegesis
 - The task of discovering what a text is saying in and to its original context
- Hermeneutics
 - The task of finding out the meaning of a text for the author and for the first readers or hearers, and then to transmit that meaning to modern readers
- Contextualisation
 - The task of applying the original meaning of the text to a new context

Hermeneutics

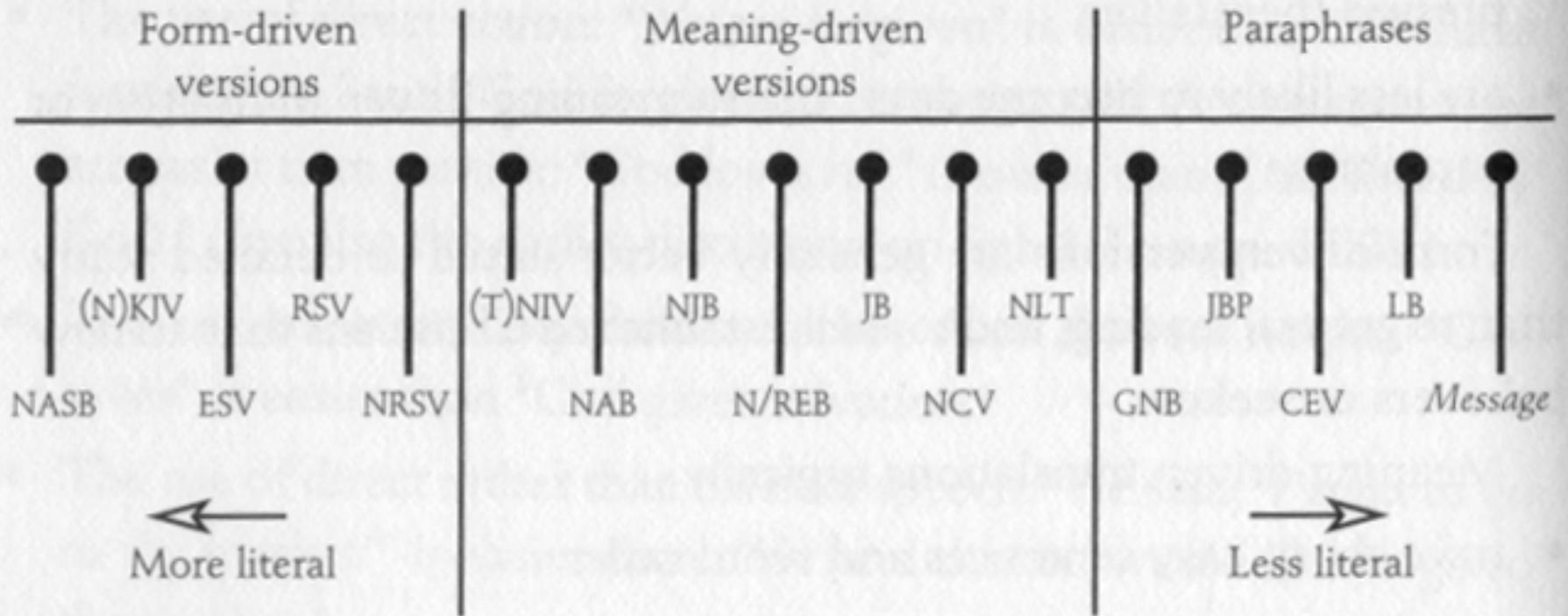
Exegesis



Contextualisation

A note about translations

Table 2.6. Bible Versions Organized by Translation Philosophy



- *NASB* 5 For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace.
- *NCV* 5 Those who live following their sinful selves think only about things that their sinful selves want. But those who live following the Spirit are thinking about the things the Spirit wants them to do. 6 If people's thinking is controlled by the sinful self, there is death. But if their thinking is controlled by the Spirit, there is life and peace.
- *The Message* Those who think they can do it on their own end up obsessed with measuring their own moral muscle but never get around to exercising it in real life. Those who trust God's action in them find that God's Spirit is in them—living and breathing God! Obsession with self in these matters is a dead end; attention to God leads us out into the open, into a spacious, free life.

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5. Pay no attention to the contexts
6. Don't think of it as a big story, or if you do, don't try to live in it
7. Don't think about trajectories that lead to Jesus
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What are your presuppositions?



What are you standing on?

There is no such thing as a 'neutral' perspective

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Genres

- Myth
- Narrative (history)
- Prophecy
- Psalm
- Wisdom
- Apocalyptic
- Gospel
- Epistle

- Myth – a story that tells a society what is important for it to know.
- Mythical does not mean ‘untrue’, it means being charged with special seriousness and importance

Relationship of myth to underlying events

- ‘If anything historically true is in the Bible, it is there not because it is historically true, but for different reasons. The reasons have presumably something to do with spiritual profundity or significance’ (Frye)
- Symmetry and numerical patterns are an important clue that myth is present
- ‘The Bible itself could not care less whether anyone ever finds an ark on Mount Arafat’: such ‘proofs’ belong to a mentality quite different from any that could conceivably have produced the Book of Genesis.
- Note: discovering ‘proof’ of something in the Bible means we have shifted our criterion of truth from the gospel to something else.







Leviathan

= Rahab

= Tannin

= The sea



Curriculum for ancient near-Eastern gods:

Creating a world (level 1)

- 1. Separate something from the chaos**
- 2. Give it form**
- 3. Give it a function**
- 4. Give it a name**

Divine acts

Naming

Separation

Assigning function

Literary-mythic images

Conquest of monster

Subduing the sea

- E.g. *Enuma Elish*: victorious Marduk splits the corpse of the conquered Tiamat:

He split her in two, like a fish for drying,
Half of her he set up and made as a cover, heaven.
He stretched out the hide and assigned watchmen,
And ordered them not to let her waters escape.

Similarities between Genesis and the ANE myths

- Quelling of chaos
- Separation
- Formless → form
- Function assigned
- Name given

Differences between Genesis and the ANE myths

- Only one God
- World created out of hospitality, and in peace not out of violence
- Humanity created to reign not to be a slave
- All earth's domains are under God's control

For background reading: other places in the OT where ANE creation mythology is at play

- Ps 74:12-14 (sea monsters = tannin)
- Ps 148:2-9 (sea creatures = tannin)
- Isaiah 51:9
- Isaiah 27:1
- Also compare Rev 20:1-3, 21:1

Apocalypse

- The canonical Revelation is one of dozens of apocalypses
- Well-known form from 200BC to 200 AD
- Relates to Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, parts of Isaiah.
- A genre borne out of persecution
- Message is communicated by visions and dreams. Symbols are fantastical not 'real' e.g. compare Luke 17:37 with Rev 9:7-10
- Stylised telling, symbolic use of numbers

Other apocalypses

Excerpt from Enoch:

- And there I saw One who had a head of days, And His head was white like wool, And with Him was another being whose countenance had the appearance of a man, And his face was full of graciousness, like one of the holy angels ² And I asked the angel who went with me and showed me all the hidden things, concerning that ³ Son of man, who he was, and whence he was, (and) why he went with the Head of days? And he answered and said unto me: This is the Son of Man who hath righteousness...

With regard to the imagery...

- Apocalypses are 'above' such mundane interests as chronology



With regard to the imagery...

- Rich background of ideas. Some from OT. Some from contemporary apocalypses.



mf



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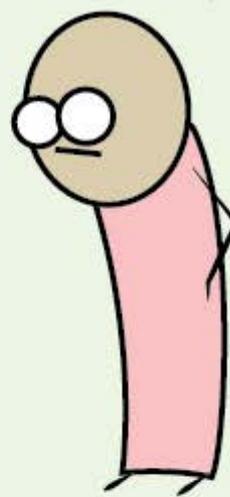
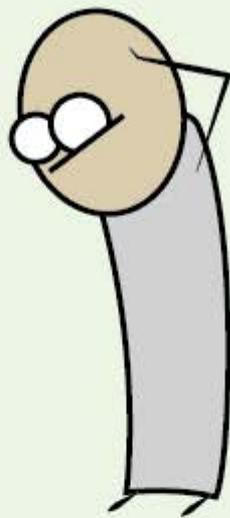
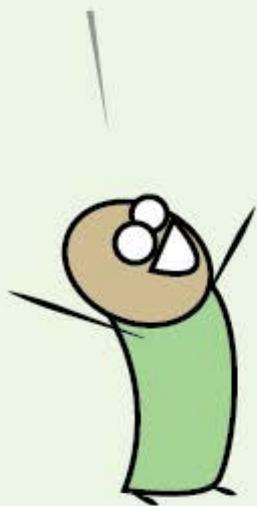
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The big story

1. The historical story
2. The theological stories
 - Creation
 - Covenant
 - Temple
 - Land
 - Etc, etc etc

YAY!

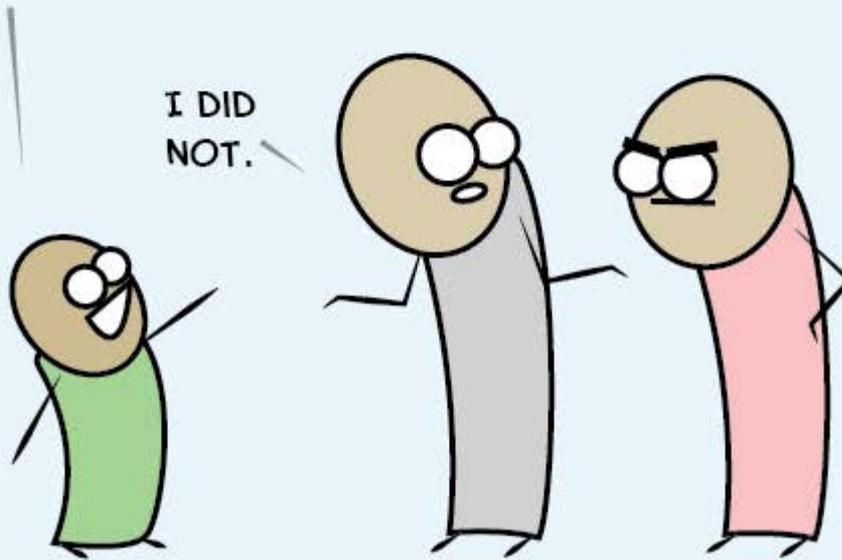
I'M GETTING A PUPPY!
I'M GETTING A PUPPY!



WHAT ON EARTH IS
HE TALKING ABOUT

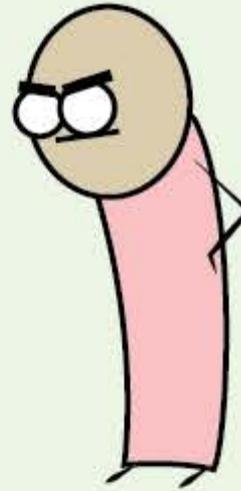
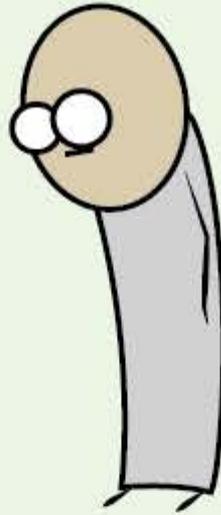
DADDY TOLD ME I
COULD GET A PUPPY!

I DID
NOT.

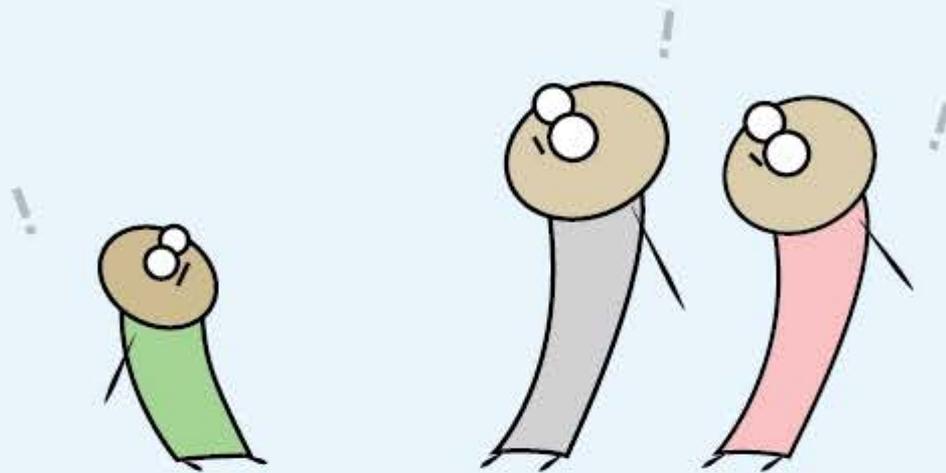


YUUH-HUUUHH!
DADDY SAID TO ME,
AND I QUOTE,

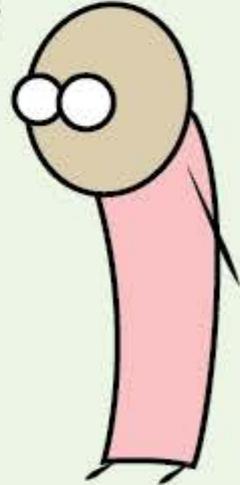
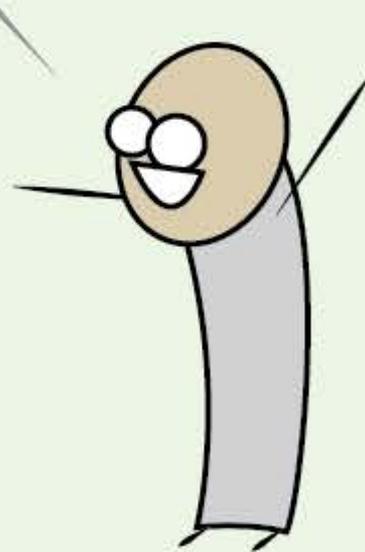
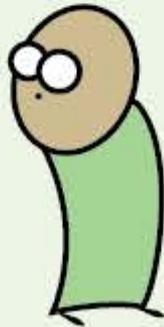
"SURE! YOU CAN
HAVE A PUPPY!"



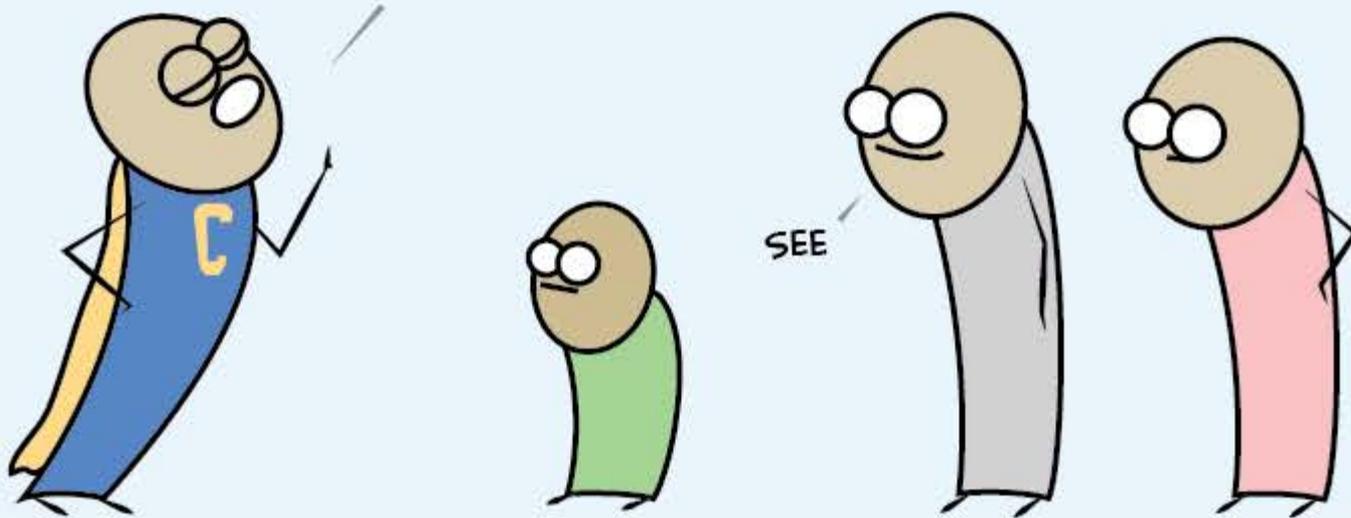
WOOOSSSSHHHH



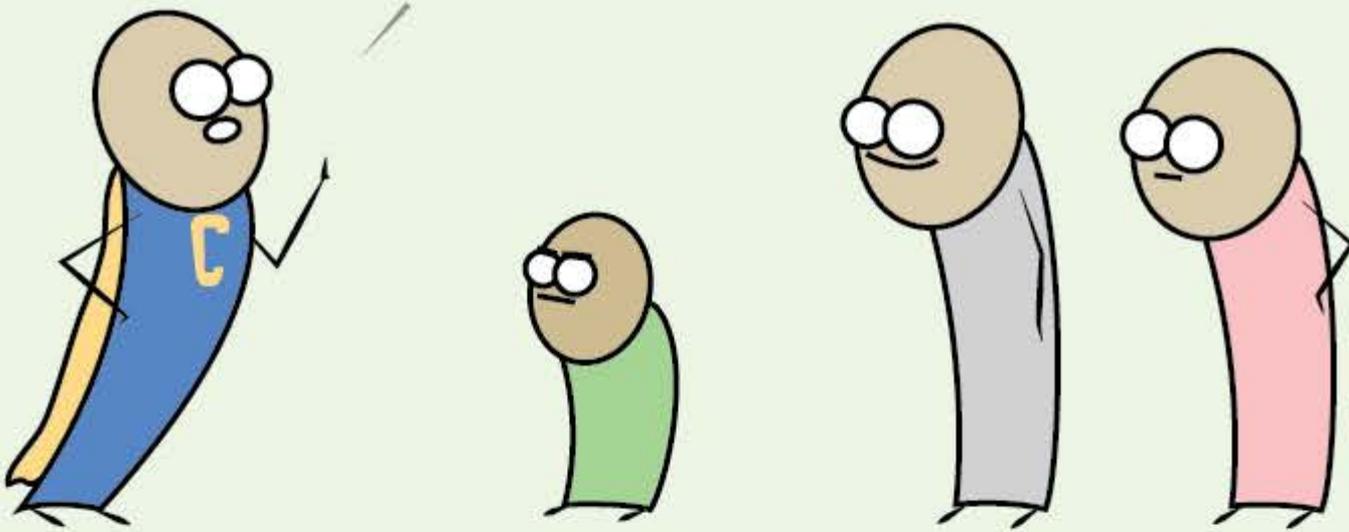
HOORAY!
CAPTAIN CONTEXT
IS HERE TO SAVE ME!



YOUNG MAN, IT IS TRUE THAT YOUR FATHER SAID THE WORDS YOU QUOTED. BUT YOU HAVE COMMITTED THE UNSEEMLY ERROR OF FAILING TO CONSIDER THE CONTEXT IN WHICH THESE WORDS WERE SPOKEN. WHAT HE SAID WAS, "SON, YOU LET YOUR GOLDFISH STARVE TO DEATH. DO YOU REALLY EXPECT ME TO SAY, 'SURE! YOU CAN HAVE A PUPPY!?!?'"



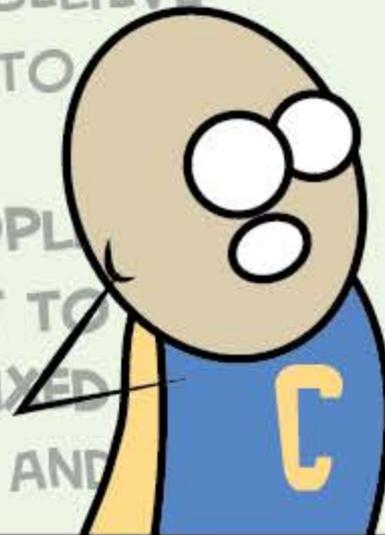
LISTEN TO ME, BOY. YOU MUST LEARN TO ALWAYS CONSIDER **CONTEXT**, ELSE BE DOOMED TO A LIFE OF INTELLECTUAL DISHONESTY, NEVER ABLE TO HAVE MEANINGFUL CONVERSATIONS WITH ANYONE WHO DOESN'T AGREE WITH YOU OR WANT EXACTLY WHAT YOU WANT.

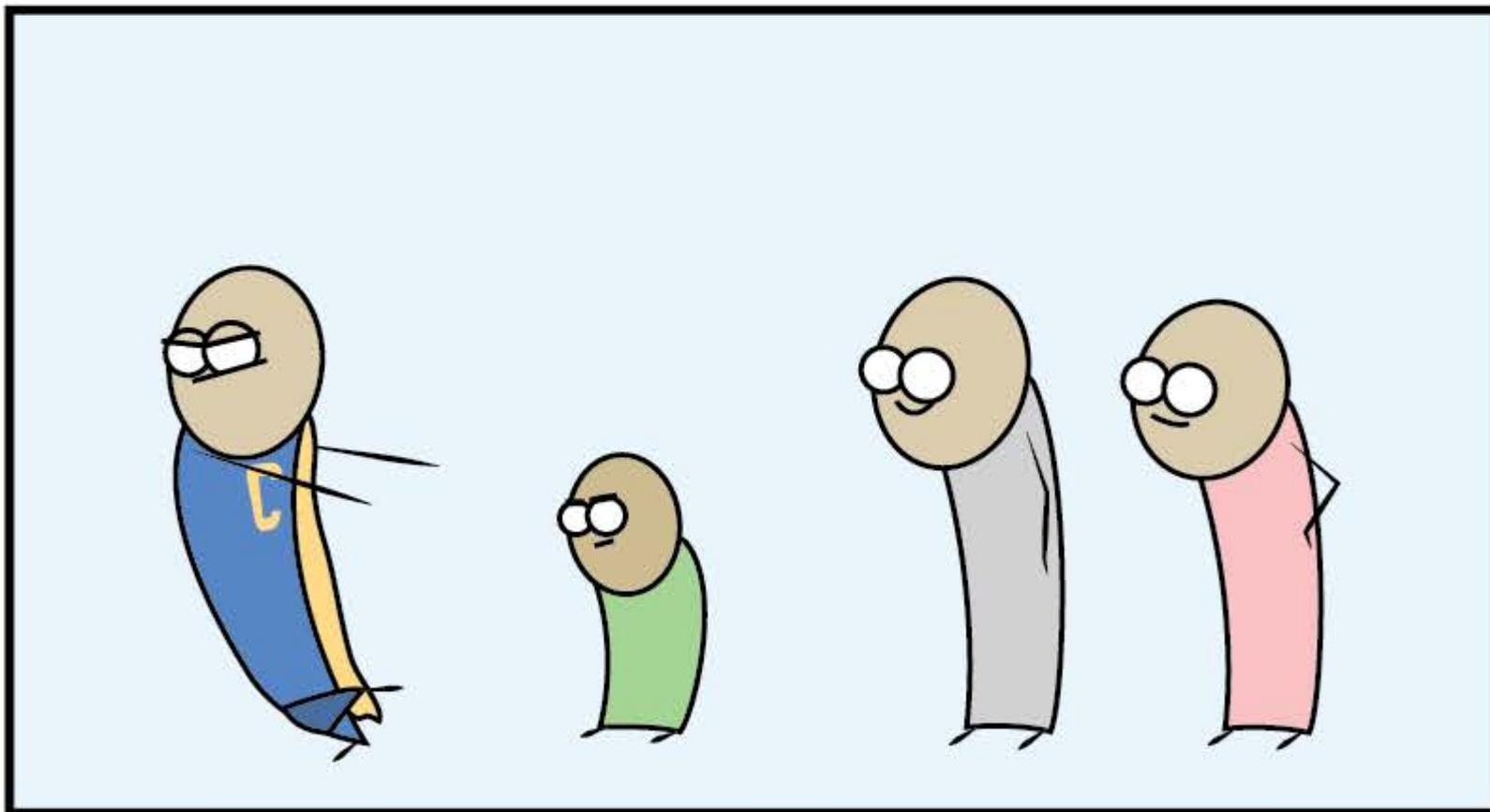


HOLD ON, FOLKS... MY CAPTAIN
CONTEXT COCHLEAS ARE PICKING
UP SOMETHING ELSE...



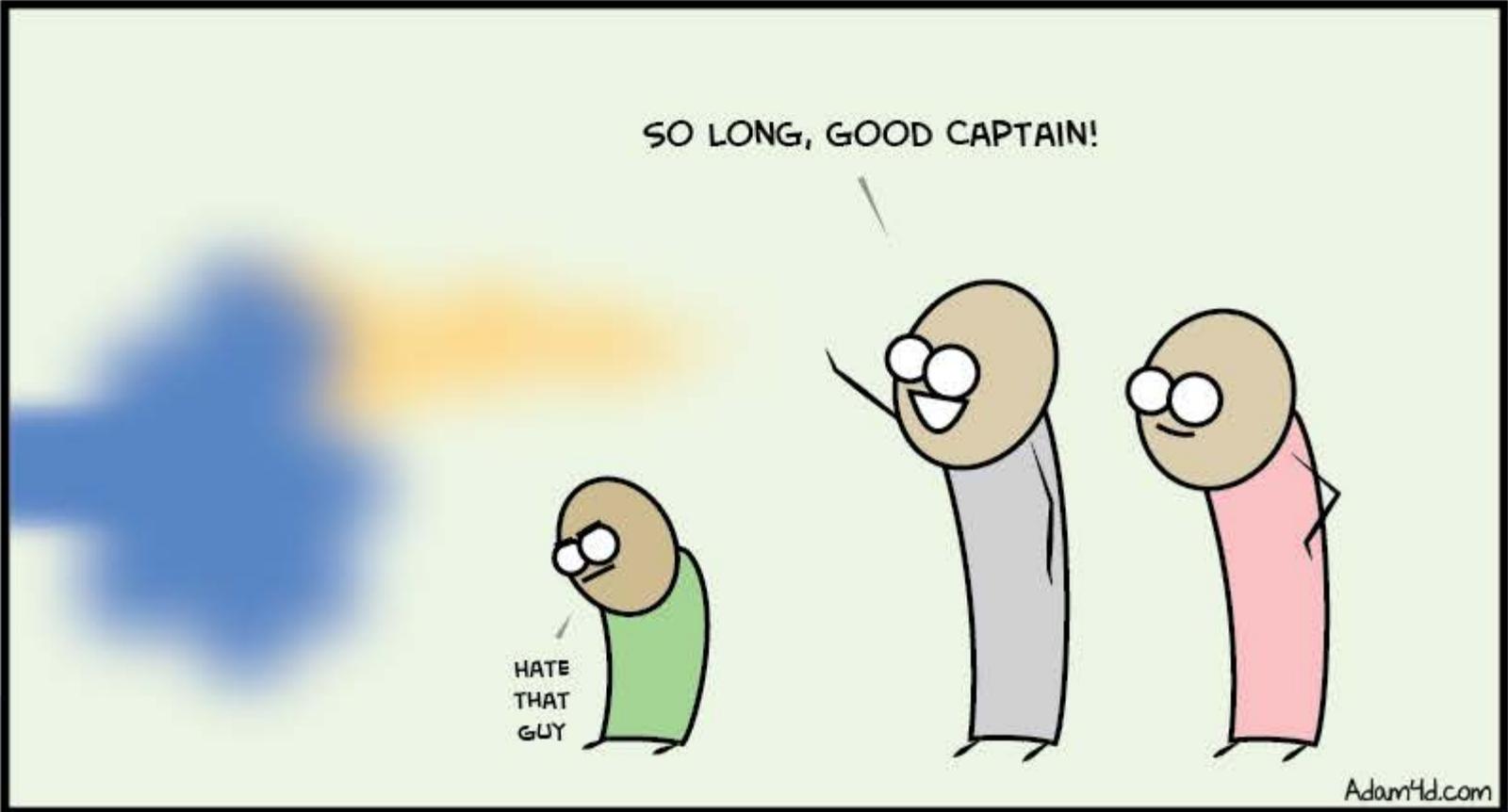
THE BIBLE IS SO STUPID
I CAN'T BELIEVE
IT SAYS TO
KILL ALL
GAY PEOPLE
AND NOT TO
WEAR MIXED
FABRICS AND





SO LONG, GOOD CAPTAIN!

HATE
THAT
GUY



Contexts:

- Textual context
- Context of the book and the canon
- Historical context
- Social context

Case study: Textual context

The cursing of the fig tree - Mark 11:12-14

Case study: Canonical context

The man with the drawn sword: Joshua 5:14

Case study: Historical context

The kingdom of God: What did the “kingdom of God” mean in Jesus’ day?



The Essenes
(Qumran) 'separate
yourself from the
wicked world and
wait for God to do
whatever God is
going to do'



The Herodians 'get along with your political bosses as well as you can, do as well out of it as you can, and hope that God will validate it somehow'



The Zealots (Masada)
'say your prayers,
sharpen your swords,
and God will give you a
military and theological
victory'

Case study: Social context

The social setting of the Corinthian church



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Rhetoric

1911.14





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Earlier (in Chapter 1) I referred to Karl Barth's reference to the "strange new world within the Bible." He passionately, relentlessly insisted that this is a book like no other book. Every expectation that we bring to this book is inadequate or mistaken. This is a text that reveals the sovereign God in being and action. It does not flatter us, it does not seek to please us. We enter this text to meet God as he reveals himself, not to look for truth or history or morals that we can use for ourselves. What he insisted upon supremely was that we do not read the Bible in order to find out how to get God into our lives, get him to participate in our lives. That's getting it backward.

Eugene Peterson: *Eat this book*

Some books that might be useful:

- How to read the Bible for all its worth – Gordon Fee
- ‘For the Love of God’ – Don Carson
- ‘The message of’ commentary series
- ‘... for today’ commentary series
- NIV application Bible commentaries
- ‘Interpretation’ commentaries
- Beware random internet resources!