*Session 9*

*Historical Exegesis: Behind the Text*

1. **Why Study the Background of a Passage?**

God spoke to real people at specific times.

Four reasons why the historical background is important:

1. We need to understand the **setting** of the original authors in order to understand their thought.
2. We need to understand the **thinking** of the authors so that we can grasp the emotional impact and value the words are intended to have.
3. We need to be able to **contextualize** the ancient message for the present time.
4. Our interpretation must be **consistent** with the historical-cultural context of that text.

**Caution**: *historical research is limited*. Realize that we cannot know everything about the history of the Bible

***What is the historical-critical method?*** It seeks to establish the historical background or the historical context of the text being interpreted. Focus is on authorship, date, audience, place of writing, and purpose of the text.

**Dangers Associated with Studying Historical Background:**

***Inaccurate background information*** (be cautious about claims people make)

***Making the background of the text more important than the meaning of the text*** (keep in mind our big goal of transformation into Christlikeness).

***Becoming nothing more than a walking database of ancient facts*** (no relevance to spiritual growth).

There are two locations to consider for the history of a passage:

1) The world *behind* the words

2) The world *within* the words

1. **Resources for Historical Studies**
2. **Archaeology:** *Provides general information about the world of the Bible but is limited*
3. **Ancient Documents:** *May have biases, few in existence today*
4. **Modern Interpretations of the Above:** *All evidence is interpreted, limited information*
5. **Key Aspects of Historical Research**
6. **Authorship**

Who was the author?

What are the characteristics of the author?

Different authors

Anonymous authorship

1. **Date**

The whole book

Events recorded in a book

1. **Audience**

Sometimes names, other times only assumed

May be narrative audience in the book or implied audience in the background

1. **Place of Writing**

Location

Circumstances

Places mentioned in the passage or book

1. **Purpose**

Why the book or passage was written

Sometimes stated, other times implied

How does the passage contribute to the purpose of the whole book?

1. **Steps to Follow**
2. **Ask specific questions**

Who spoke or wrote the words in your passage?

When did he or she live?

To whom was this book written?

What events stand behind the text, or what events does the text presume?

What is the author’s background?

When did the author write?

What type of ministry did the author have?

What type of relationship did the author have with his audience?

Why is the author writing?

Are there people, places, dates, or other historical questions that are mentioned in the text or stand behind it?

1. **Basic Tools for Historical Research:**

Bible Handbooks

Old Testament and New Testament Introductions

Commentaries

Bible Atlases

Bible Dictionaries and Encyclopedias

Background Commentaries

Old Testament and New Testament Histories

Special Studies in Ancient Life and Culture

Computer Software and the Internet

1. **Understand as much as possible**

Realize the limitations of our knowledge about the ancient world

Determine how the ancient setting is similar and different from our situation

Determine the impact of the passage upon the original listeners

1. **Understand the language**

Be objective, avoid biases

1. **Usefulness for Preaching and Teaching**

Helps tell the story

Keep to the facts

**Big Ideas**

1. The goal of the historical-critical method is to understand better the world of the Bible.
2. Archaeology and ancient literature help us understand the general historical background of the Bible.
3. It is helpful to ask careful historical questions about authorship, date, audience, place of writing, and purpose.
4. Asking good questions and then looking for the answers in the Bible and secondary literature are the key steps in studying the historical background.