

Historical Methods

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Intro: to Reconstructing the historical situation of a letter involves understanding the implications of its setting in time.

I.) The historical method of approach to a text is concerned with true history.

A. Original history which gave birth to a text.

1. We must begin with observation.
2. We know about conditions in Corinth but we don't know how those conditions relate to our time.

B. We are also interested in our history.

1. This is important in application.
2. We must know what principles meant in original time.
3. The problems of 68 A.D. are different from our problems.
4. The word of God is relevant because they are revelation.
5. Making the Scriptures relevant is nonsense; Scripture is relevant.
6. Our task it to make it demonstrate its relevancy.
7. The same principles that apply to early Christianity apply to us today.
8. This makes the Word of God fresh, transcending any barrier.
 - a. Corinthians dealt with meat sacrificed to idols.
 - b. We don't face that but principles are similar.

B. Studying the Bible involves a study of history.

1. Many history teachers embalm history.
 1. One teacher, however, helped me to get excited about history.
 2. This can help us in Bible study.

I.) Historical study of the Bible can be helpful in three areas.

A. Interpretation.

1. Understanding any book depends on its historical setting.

a. An importer of Oriental lace showed me exquisite velvet telling me that lace is appreciated best under a bright light against a dark background.

b. Historical setting is like the bright light against the dark background of the Word of God.

2. The Minor Prophets, for example, give us God's interpretation of history.

a. Most people don't appreciate the Minor Prophets because they haven't understood the background.

1. Habakkuk complained that God was silent.

2. When he pressed God about it God finally said he was sending judgment.

3. The Psalms are rarely understood without the background.

i. The background of Psalm 51 is David's sin with Bathsheba.

ii. Psalm 24 talks of lifting up the gates O ancient doors.

iii. David had to pass by Jerusalem before he took that city and the people there taunted him that he would never be able to take the city.

iv. Psalm 24 is an answer to that taunt because the King of glory is now entering this conquered city.

v. New Testament epistles are rooted in Acts, coming out of a historical setting.

vi. Corinth faced meat to idols, immorality, and a party spirit. Some wanted Peter, some Paul, some Apollo, and some wanted Christ.

vii. They were all out of sorts.

B. Illustration.

1. Bible history is a great source of illustration material.

2. A Bible illustration is good for two reasons.

a. It illustrates truth.

b. It teaches the Bible while illustrating truth.

3. Preachers can assume nothing but must explain everything.

4. I read through the Bible once a year just for illustrations.

5. Begin with a 3X5 file for illustrations, writing them down.

6. File them over years for a rich reservoir of illustrations.

7. Illustrations from 17th century England is not powerful.

8. Get illustrations from current history or from the Bible.

a. I spoke to some professionals and one non-Christian told me this was the first time he heard what the Bible said about his field.

b. It was eye-opening.

9. Developing imagination.

a. History develops drama.

b. Christian workers have a three fold temptation.

1. Shine.
2. Recline.
3. Whine.

c. A fourth temptation is to be boring.

1. It is a crime to bore people with the word of God.
2. In a group we need to present facts with interest.
3. A Time reported was asked why his reporting was so different.
 - i. He begins his stories with an illustration of people involved with the events.
 - ii. Time reporters are into details.
4. Many preachers bore people to tears.
5. I heard a liberal preach on Genesis 22 and I loved his description of Abraham taking Isaac up Mt. Mariah.
 - i. He described Abraham beautifully.
 - ii. But he missed the point of God's provision.
 - iii. We need to be both descriptive and accurate.

III.) The procedure of historical study.

A. Develop a biblical history.

1. Set the historical stage.

- a. All Scripture is inspired and profitable for doctrine and teaching. (2 Timothy 3:16)
- b. When Paul wrote this to Timothy he didn't have a New Testament.
- c. This referred to the Old Testament.

d. The New Testament is only one third of the Old Testament, yet the Old Testament is unknown to many Christians.

e. Most Christians have never been taught the Old Testament.

1. Most think the order of the books reflects chronology.
2. Ezra comes just before Nehemiah and they happen to be contemporaries.
3. Esther comes next so people think she is contemporary with Nehemiah but this is not true.
4. Job is next so he must have been contemporary with Esther but this is not true.
5. Psalms is next but this book followed Job by 200-400 years.
6. People who think the order reflects chronology are lost.

f. The order of chronology is as follows.

1. Genesis, book of beginnings, the seed plot of the Bible.
2. Exodus, book of redemption.
3. Numbers, the book, of wanderings.
4. Leviticus and Deuteronomy tell you what happened in Numbers.
5. Joshua, the book of success, and Judges a book of defeat.
 - i. The key to Joshua is obedience. (Joshua 1:8)
 - ii. The key to Judges is the disobedience of the people. (Judges 21:25)
6. Ruth occurred during Judges.

7. 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings all deal with the kingdom period.

- i. 1 Samuel is preparation for the kingdom.
- ii. 2 Samuel is establishment of the Kingdom.
- iii. 1 Kings is the division of the Kingdom.
- iv. 2 Kings is the loss of the Kingdom.
- v. Saul, David and Solomon had a united kingdom.
- vi. After Solomon the kingdom split in to Israel in the north and Judah in the south.
- vii. Israel is taken captive by Assyria.
- viii. Judah goes into captivity by Babylon.
- ix. I comes before J and A comes before B.

8. Following the captivity we have Ezra and Nehemiah.

- i. Ezra rebuilds the temple.
- ii. Nehemiah rebuilds the wall.
- iii. At the end of Nehemiah we are at the end of the Old Testament, historically speaking, though it is placed in the middle of the Old Testament books.