

8. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Part 3: Context – “Where does the passage fit?”
How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament

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Goal: Understand the historical situation from which the author composed the text and identify any historical details the author mentions or assumes.

1. Introduction to Assessing Historical Context

- a. The nature of historical context.
- b. Key questions for assessing historical context:
 - _____ The authorship, audience, major figures and powers
 - _____ The physical location and geography
 - _____ The original date of the message in relation to periods, powers, and events
 - _____ The cause and purpose of the message
 - _____ The genre and thought flow: Why did he say it that way?
 - _____ What is said and assume with respect to:
 - a) Linguistic familiarity
 - b) Worldviews
 - c) Societal and economic systems
 - d) Behavioral patterns
 - e) Political climate
 - f) Religious practices
 - g) Physical features

c. Shared assumptions and the Bible's clarity

- How much historical context information is necessary as we approach the biblical text?
- Scripture's clarity or “perspicuity”

2. Key Spheres for Historical Context

- a. A proper grasp of linguistic signs
- b. A detailed grasp of the persons, institutions, and events of Scripture
- c. A general awareness of life in this created world (e.g., “ants,” Prov 6:6; “heavens,” Ps 19:1; “birds,” Matt 6:26, 28)
- d. A proper approach to extrabiblical data
 - E.g., Creation accounts
 - E.g., Ezekiel 1

3. Guidelines for Engaging Historical Context

- a. *Be clear* on the type of historical-context information you are assessing.
- b. *Be careful* in your assessment of comparative literature.
- c. *Be restrained* in your use of historical-context material.
- d. *Be relentless* in your commitment to draw your message from the text.

4. The Historical Context of 1 Samuel 13:14