Historical Context

• Historical methods
• Historical/cultural context
• Authorship
• Examples of historical context

Historical Methods

• The Bible comes out of particular historical/cultural contexts.
• Historical-critical method
  – Historical = historically aware
  – Critical = asking questions and making judgments about the text
  – Results depend upon preunderstandings

Historical Methods

• Grammatical historical theological method
  – Grammatical = interpret according to the rules of grammar
  – Historical = interpret according to the facts of history and culture
  – Theological = interpret as God’s self-disclosure, having normative authority
Historical/Cultural Context

• What information about the historical/cultural context do we need to understand?
  – Information about the composition of the text (author, audience, date, occasion)
  – Details in the text (people, places, things, events, practices, institutions, ideas)
  – Read the text and context for information.
  – Use Bible dictionaries, Bible encyclopedias, Bible atlases, OT or NT history, commentary, etc.

Historical/Cultural Context

• What’s wrong with this picture?

“... things are tough—but, please, these are biblical times!”

Issues in Authorship

• Biblical authorship can be complicated...

“... and I suggest we call them the 'ten commandments' rather than 'ten things you'd better do or you're in big trouble'!”
Issues in Authorship

- Most authors of biblical books aren’t identified in the books themselves.
- In ancient times, authorship wasn’t as important as it is today.
- We may be uncomfortable with questions of authorship because it challenges our traditions.
- But do we put tradition on a par with Scripture?

Authorship in Epistles

- Paul’s co-authors
- Dictation of epistles
- Pseudonymity (writing under the name of someone else)
- Most commonly disputed Pauline letters: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Ephesians.

Authorship in Prophetic Books

- Oral nature of prophecy
- Narrative sections
- Collection, transmission, and editing of oracles
Researching Authorship

- Don’t assume anything.
- Get clues from the text itself first.
- Consult secondary sources and weigh their evidence.
- Implications of canon.

Examples of Historical Context

- What do we need to know in order to understand the following passages?
  - 1 Kings 14:21-31
  - Jeremiah 49:7-22

Examples of Historical Context

- Examine Haggai 2:1-9:
  - Author, audience, date, occasion
  - Where does passage fit in OT history?
  - What do we need to know about the social or cultural background?
  - Are there other OT passages that would help us get this information?
  - What details do we need to understand?
Consider this…

- How can the Bible be both historically conditioned and universally true?
- Does emphasizing the original historical context of Scripture (the meaning “then and there” for “them”) make Scripture less relevant to us today? Why or why not?
- If you see any potential problems in these areas, how can we attempt to overcome them?