

2. Basic elements

- a. Geography--a knowledge of the geographical situation is often helpful, especially when interpreting historical narrative. Thus, it is helpful to know both the geography and history of Samaria when considering the statement of the woman at Sychar's well: "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship" (Jn 4:20).
- b. Politics--it goes almost without saying that a basic knowledge of the political history of the ancient Near East is crucial to a good understanding of much of the Bible. Consider, for example, the background of Is. 1:1.
- c. Culture--this is a broad term by which we refer to "the climate of opinion, and network of ideas and values which for the social environment with which each individual lives his life" (H.D. McDonald, cited by W. Kaiser, Jr., Toward an Exegetical Theology [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981], p. 114).

Knowledge of culture will frequently illuminate biblical materials. For example, an understanding of agrarian and pastoral culture will help in the appreciation of passages like Jn. 10: 1-18; 15:1-8. Or again, an interesting article by David Smith ("Jesus and the Pharisees in Socio-Anthropological Perspective," Trinity Journal 6 [1985]: 151-56) suggests that a challenge to ritual laws of purity lies behind Jesus' use of spittle in healing (Mk. 7:33; 8:23; Jn. 9:6).

3. Fallacies of historical methodology

Excellent reading in this area is the clever book by D.H. Fischer, Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought (New York: Harper, 1970). We will note just a few of the many cautions given by Fischer.

- a. Fallacies of factual verification--this is the title of the entire second chapter of Fischer's book and will bear careful reading. Note particularly:

--the fallacy of presumptive proof (or circular proof)

A person makes an exegetical assumption and uses arguments to prove the assumption by presupposing that it's already true - Circular reasoning

--the fallacy of prevalent proof

Mass opinion is made the method of verification. For example: The use of a large list of authorities to prove a certain position.

--the fallacy of possible proof

The method of showing that a certain position is possible and then assuming that you've proven ~~the~~ that position