

The Grammatical-Historical Method

1. Definition

- A. *“Grammatical-historical exegesis attempts to uncover the meaning a text would have had to its original human author and readers.”¹*
- B. Definition: *The meaning of a text is what the author intended his readers to understand by his words.*

2. Method

- A. *Our goal is to carefully, systematically, study Scripture to discover the meaning intended by the author.*
- B. *We seek to understand what it was the author originally intended for his readers to grasp. In this, we follow many of the same conventions followed by others seeking to understand and interpret literary works.*
- C. *In order to get from the American continent of the 21st century to the world of the Bible, we must cross over bridges at least 2,000 years old and 10,000 miles wide. This is the work of hermeneutics, the goal of exegesis. The grammatical-historical method is designed to transport us across these bridges back into the world of the Bible authors.*
- D. *Having crossed the bridges back into the world of the Bible and having understood the meaning the original author intended, our job is only half done. We must then cross back to our world. We do this by assigning significance to the meaning we’ve discovered. We say to ourselves, “Okay, God rescued Daniel from some lions; what significance does that have for me? For my family? For my church?” This is the work of application, of assigning significance to the original meaning.*
- E. *In addition to considering the genre, the observations and questions we ask in doing grammatical-historical exegesis fall into three main areas:*
 - 1. What are the words and grammar of the passage?
 - 2. What is the literary context?

¹ Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand*, p. 112.

3. What is the historical context?

3. Areas of study

A. *The words and grammar of the passage*

1. Look for the plain meaning of the words and sentences.
 - a. This is the basic, customary, socially designated meaning.
 - b. Plain doesn't mean wooden or rigid; it just means normal.
 - c. The plain meaning doesn't mean the words don't carry with them a spiritual meaning.
 - d. Plain doesn't ignore figures of speech, allegories, symbols and types in Scripture.
 - e. Plain does mean that one doesn't read in figurative or allegorical meanings.
2. Grammar may consider:
 - a. Figures of speech (simile, metaphor)
 - Ps. 19:4 "In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun" (metaphor)
 - Ps. 19:5 "...which is like a champion rejoicing to run his course" (simile)
 - 1 Th. 5:23 "...destruction will come upon them suddenly as labor pains on a pregnant woman" (simile)
3. Tools for study:
 - a. Theological dictionaries
 - b. Study Bibles
 - c. Commentaries

B. *The literary context*

1. Definition: “*Literary context is the words, sentences, paragraphs, or chapters that surround and relate to a text.*”²
2. Principles for determining literary context:
 - a. How does this verse fit into the immediate context?
 - b. How does this passage fit into the paragraphs or chapters nearby?
 - c. How do these paragraphs or chapters fit into the book?
 - d. How does this book fit into the Bible?
 - e. Why is this passage here and not somewhere else?
 - f. What is the main point of this passage? Of the book?
 - g. Are there key words or repeated words or phrases?
3. Tools for study:
 - a. Your eyes and your Bible: reading is the key tool.
 - b. Study Bibles
 - c. Commentaries

C. The historical context

1. Definition: “*Historical context is the culture, customs, languages, beliefs, and history of the author and his original audience.*”³
2. Principles for determining historical context (the big picture in and around a book):
 - a. Where did this take place?
 - Ephesus is in modern day Turkey.
 - Jerusalem is in Israel.
 - Babylon is in Iraq.
 - b. When did this take place?

² Daniel Doriani, *Getting the Message*, p. 31.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

- Revelation was written about 90 AD.
 - The exodus from Egypt happened around 1446 BC.
- c. Who wrote it?
- Amos was a shepherd from Judah who prophesied to the Northern Kingdom.
 - Jeremiah was a priest who wrote before the exile.
 - Ezekiel was from a priestly family and wrote during the exile in Babylon.
- d. Are there any customs unique to the culture here?
- Why did the Pharisees become angry with the disciples when they ate grain on the Sabbath?
- e. In what language was the text written?
- Greek
 - Hebrew
 - Aramaic
- f. Who was in power at the time?
- Nebuchadnezzar was a Babylonian.
 - Darius was a Mede.
- g. What philosophies would have been prevalent at the time?
- Plato's dualistic view of life: body bad, spirit good
- h. What was the geography or topography?
- People always "went up" to Jerusalem.
 - Samaria: the result of the old Northern Kingdom blending together with people imported by the Assyrians
3. Tools for study:
- Bible atlas
 - Study Bibles
 - Commentaries