Lesson 17: INTERPRETING IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT (part 3)

Examples of Using Historical Insights to Study the Bible.

1. **HISTORY PROPER**
2. **HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY**
3. **GEOLOGY**
4. **METEOROLOGY**
5. **BOTANY**
6. **ZOOLOGY**

7. **AGRICULTURE: Psalm 1:3 & the irrigation of orchards.**

   a. The imagery in this verse is often mistaken for that of a wild tree by a flowing river.

   b. But the image is one of horticulture, not wild nature. The Egyptians & Babylonians were renowned for their orchard cultivation, nourished thru extensive irrigation ditches flowing with river water. In this psalm the term rendered as “rivers” is better be translated “**channels**.”

8. **CULTURE: CLOTHING. 1 Sam 25:29 & the fold in the garment.**

   a. Many garments were more like **wraps** than fitted items. In particular, flowing robes & tunics would need to be folded in various places to make them fit & functional.

   b. Observations from parts of the third world of today are in some ways illustrative of this style of clothing. Note this devotional by Dr. William Barrick years ago.

In Chittagong, Bangladesh, on the other side of the world from my boyhood home, I waited while an old man tugged at the knot in the waist of his lunghi (a one-piece, skirt-like garment for men). It reminded me of my mother's tying a few coins into the corner of my handkerchief when I was a small boy. The old man's gnarled fingers worked until the knot was loosened. Out came some small coins, a tiny box of wooden matches, and two old, rusty keys. These were his treasures.

In ancient Palestine the fold of a garment was used in the same fashion. In the verse quoted above, when Abigail blessed David she shared with him a tender picture of God's care. The old man on the streets of Chittagong helped me to understand what Abigail meant and what David understood.

The Revised English Bible makes the picture explicit: "The Lord your God will wrap your life up and put it with his own treasure." We are God's treasure, cared for and held close as though we are wrapped in the folds of God's own garment.

William D. Barrick (Chittagong, Bangladesh)
(published in the devotional *Upper Room*)

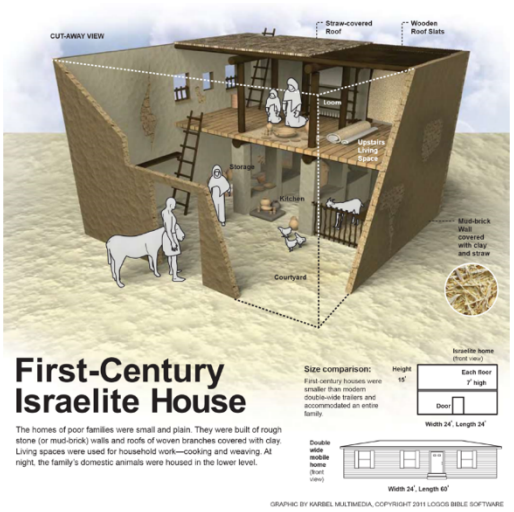
9. **CULTURE: THE MARKETPLACE. Isaiah 55:1-2 & water vendors.**

   a. The image evoked may be that of a street vendor, calling out to people to come purchase his drinks & food (“**Ho**!”). In the crowded bazaars of third world cities, merchants often call out to potential buyers.

   b. God’s good news is likened to water, wine, milk, & bread: the stuff of life sold in the bustling marketplace. Isaiah is functioning as an evangelist, calling the people to not settle for cheap spiritual substitutes.

10, CULTURE: HOUSES & BARNS: Luke 2:7 & the misnamed "inn."

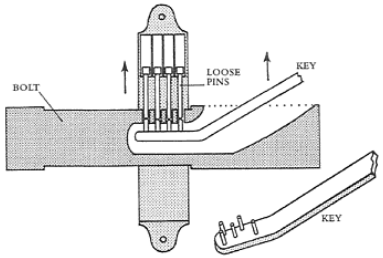
a. The "inn" of Luke 2:7 is probably a lodging place of a house, not a public inn for travelers (there's a more specific word for that). Jewish homes in this era typically housed livestock on the **bottom** floor while residential living took place upstairs.



b. Failure to understand this feature led to th many extra-biblical legends and artwork, including images of a scowling innkeeper, pointing Mary and Joseph to go out to the barn.

11. ARCHEOLOGY: PHYSICAL REMAINS. Isaiah 22:22, Rev. 3:7 and the key on the shoulder.

a. In this prophecy against Hezekiah's second in command, Shebna, these words pronounce a blessing on his replacement, Eliakim. Part of the blessing is that he would have a key placed on his shoulder.



b. Keys in ancient days were not small objects that fit in pockets (which most clothes didn't have anyway) but large tools that might be tied to one's clothing,

c. The "key of the house of David" was a functional tool to open royal chambers & treasuries as well as a kind of **insignia** worn on one's garment over the shoulder.

d. Archaeological excavations have discovered that during this period, the Assyrians had perfected a tumbler system which utilized a large wooden key. The technology spread quickly across the Ancient Near East.

12. ARCHEOLOGY: LITERARY REMAINS. The Mosaic Covenant and Hittite Treaties

a. At roughly the same time that Israel was coming out of Egypt, another world power governed much of the Ancient Near East: the Hittites.

b. When the Hittites overtook a realm, they typically made a covenant with the conquered peoples. They peoples pledged obedience to the Hittite king, and the king pledged certain benefits (such as military protection) to the peoples.

c. In 1907 a trove of Hittite treaties were uncovered, and within a generation or two, scholars were making parallels with the Mosaic Covenant.

d. This evidence suggests that God revealed his government for Israel to be categorically different than anything Moses had seen in **Egypt**. In fact, it mirrored a system of Egypt's great nemesis.

Early Hittite Treaties	Deuteronomy
Preamble	Preamble 1.1-4
Historical Introduction	History 1.5-3.29
Stipulations	Stipulations chs 4-26
Document Clause	Document Clause ch 27
God List	
Curses/Blessings	Blessings/curses ch 28

from Gordon Wenham, "The Date of Deuteronomy: Linch-Pin of Old Testament Criticism. Part 1." (Themelios 10.3 - April 1985): 15-20.