

Ministry and Humanities Department

Biblical Research Information – Exegesis Guidelines

The Exegesis Paper

An *Exegesis Paper* is the result of research into the historical, literary and theological meaning of a passage of the Bible. Exegesis is based on the principle of authorial intent, which asserts that the meaning of a passage is determined by describing what the author intended to say to the people who would read the book for the first time. Research is needed because our context, culture, and perspective are different from those of the original authors and readers.

Exegesis is the process of looking at biblical passages to learn what God said through the words of the writers to the people first reading them. The *exegesis process* first examines the context of the time of the writing: author, audience, and events of that day. Then the process focuses on a specific passage in order to describe the meaning of the words and thoughts used by the writer as they would have been understood by the people reading them. The last part of the *Exegesis Paper* is when the student summarizes the biblical principles pulled out of the passage and makes application for the present. In short, the *Exegesis Paper* takes the Word of God written in the words of times past and makes them understandable and applicable to our day.

GUIDELINES FOR BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

Exegesis is the systemic attempt to discover the author's meaning of a passage of Scripture. It involves the application of specific steps of inquiry into the message of a passage culminating in an application of that message to today's situation. To better understand the process of exegesis you might examine the following:

Carver, Frank G. "A Working Model for Teaching Exegesis." *Interpreting God's*

Word Today. Eds. W. McCown, and J. E. Massey. Anderson: Warner

Press, 1982. 221-247. Print.

[Located on the open shelf, BS 476 .I64 1982.]

Keck, L. E., and G. M. Tucker, "Exegesis," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*.

Sup Vol. Ed. K. Crim. Nashville: Abingdon, 1976. 296-303. Print.

[Located in Reference and open sections, BS 440 .I63]

McCormick, C. "Exegesis," *New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. Vol.2.

Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006. 366. *Ministry Matters*. Web. 18

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I. **Factors for you to consider in preparing an exegesis.**

A. Translations: Work with modern translations of the Bible, especially those prepared by committees rather than one person. Avoid paraphrases such as The Living Bible and The Good News Bible. The NASB is an accurate study Bible. Other recommended versions are RSV, NEB, JB, NAB, TEV, NIV, and NRSV.

B. The "literal meaning": Look for the single meaning of a text. Only rarely will a passage indicate that it has more than one meaning. Avoid allegorizing and spiritualizing on your part. Look for the message the author intended, not what you think it should say.

C. The contexts: Consider the specific passage within its larger contexts: the whole Bible, the division of which it is a part, the whole book and the immediate surrounding material. Scripture helps to interpret Scripture (be careful not to violate B).

D. Literary considerations: Since the Bible is a literary work; an exegesis must consider the structure of its language, definition of its terms, and the functions of the various parts of speech. Also, what type of literature is it: prose or poetry, history or allegory, apocalyptic, literal or symbolic, lament or hymn, law or diary?

E. Historical exegesis: As ancient literature pervaded by a strong sense of history, the Bible must be studied in relation to its historical and geographical situation and the life-setting (*Sitz im Leben*) of its peoples, as well as its own history of development as oral and written literature.

F. Biblical theology: The Bible was written from the standpoint of faith in the redemptive actions of the God of Israel. What the passage says about God, humanity, and their relationship should be a primary consideration of an exegesis. The content of the passage must also be considered in the light of the broader message of the entire Bible.

G. Devotional thrust: Since the Bible is addressed to faith and seeks to engage the student personally (existentially); the devotional study of Scripture should go hand-in-hand with critical study. The study must ask, what does this passage say to our present life situation? What meaning does it have for us today? What is God saying to the Church, the world, and me personally?

II. Procedure for the interpretation of a biblical passage (choose, investigate, and write).

A. Selection of the biblical passage: Choose a significant passage with an adequate and distinguishable scope—a natural unit of thought. Consider the paragraphing in the NRSV in order to choose an appropriate length.

B. Research the biblical passage:

1. Step one: consider the context. Read the passage in the context of the book or at least the chapters around it. What type of literature is it: prose, poetry, parable, sermon, or letter? What is the message or purpose of the book? How does the passage relate to the larger theme? When and to whom was the book written? Who actually composed the book? (The answers to these questions will compose Part A.)

a) Resources: Introductions to the Old Testament/New Testament, Introductions to Bible books in commentaries, and Bible dictionaries (See “Exegesis Sources”).

2. Step two: now concentrate upon the passage. Analyze the verses of the chosen passage. What does each verse precisely have to say? (The answers to these questions will compose Part B.)

a) Investigate word meanings, especially key words.

b) Recommended Resources: Lexicons (if you have adequate literacy in the biblical languages), Word-study books. Examples:

(1) *Theological Dictionary of the NT* BS 440 .K513

(2) *Theological Dictionary of the OT* BS 440 .B5713

(3) Richardson, *A Theological Wordbook of the Bible* BS 440. R53 (reserve)

(4) Earl, *Word Meanings in the NT* BS 2385 .E2

(5) Vincent, *Word Studies in the NT* BS 2385 .V5

c) Standard Commentaries; examples:

(1) *Interpreter's Bible* (IB) [exegesis and introduction, not exposition] BS 491 .2 .I55; also in *Ministry Matters*.

(2) *New Interpreter's Bible* BS 491 .2 .N484 (reserve), also in *Ministry Matters*.

- (3) International Critical Commentary (ICC) BS 491 .2 .B7
- (4) Moffatt New Testament Commentary BS 2341. M6J (reserve)
- (5) *Wesleyan Bible Commentary* BS 491 .2 .W4
- (6) Word Biblical Commentary BS 491 .2 .W67
- (7) *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* BS 491 .2 .E96
- (8) One volume commentaries on specific books
- (9) Supplementary Commentary References. You might receive additional assistance from "one volume whole Bible" commentaries such as *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*, *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, or *Asbury Bible Commentary*. However, these do not count as part of the required number of resources.

d) Bible Dictionaries, Examples:

- (1) *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (IDB) BS 440 .I63
- (2) *Zondervan's Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* BS 440 .Z63
- (3) *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* BS 440 .A54 (reserve)

e) Compare translations: KJV, RSV, NIV, NASB, ASB, NEB, JB, NAB, TEV, and NRSV

f) Consider the elements of composition of the verses: functions of the various parts of speech, verb tenses, and sentence structure. The standard commentaries will prove helpful to examine these concerns (See above).

3. Step three: now summarize succinctly the teachings of the passage. Concentrate upon the central theme or argument as discovered in Part B, but do not be drawn off into a tangent or minor theme. What does the passage (not the entire book) have to say theologically about God, humanity, their relationship, or humanity's relationship to humanity or the created order? What insight have you received? How can you relate its message to today? (The answers to these questions will compose Part C.)

C. Organization and composition of research of the biblical passage:

1. Organize the exegesis in a fashion appropriate to the passage and according to the basic rules of good composition: prepare an outline first; state your purpose, procedure, and limits; write an introduction, main body, and conclusion; compile source information of only those sources which are actually cited in the paper. If you are not fluent in the biblical languages, do not even attempt to write specific words in Greek or Hebrew in your discussion of key words. The paper must be typed, double-spaced with standard fonts and one inch margins, have scripture verses when quoted, from the NRSV, and also include a proper title page. The selected biblical passage may be presented on the title page, if so desired. This text, however, must not appear in the body of the paper.

2. The form for the paper will conform to the standard established by the MLA. The source must be cited when either ideas or words are borrowed. Direct quotes must be included in quotation marks, or if more than four lines are quoted, set off in a block with only the left margin indented one inch. For citing sources in the body of the paper, use a parenthetical reference is to be used (Author #).

3. Construct an appropriate "Works Cited" page that will consist of all sources actually cited in the paper, arranged in alphabetical order by the authors' last names in proper MLA form.

(These guidelines are based in part on the work of W. L. Winget.)

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