

Writing an Exegesis Paper

What is it?

An exegesis paper is one in which the writer works to interpret a Biblical passage. The writer determines the what the passage meant in its original context, and how it can be applied to modern day readers. The following are some general guidelines to writing an exegesis. Your instructor will have specific instructions to follow.

Observation

Read the passage carefully several times. What is actually happening in the text? Who is mentioned in the text? Is there a main speaker? Are there multiple people speaking? Are there any places mentioned? Is there any indication of when the events in this passage occurred? What things are being described or discussed? Are people being given instructions? Promises? Words of encouragement? Warnings? Are there other scriptures being referred to? Are there any words that are repeated, emphasized, or otherwise stand out?

Social Context

How did people live during this time period? How did they interact with others, their families, neighbors, or people from other areas? What did they believe about God, themselves, or each other? A valuable source to use here would be the *IVP Bible Background Commentary* for the Old and New Testaments.

Literary Context

What events happen before and after this passage? How does this passage relate to the rest of the chapter and book in which it is included? What is the genre, or type of literature (i.e. psalm, proverb, epistle, law, narrative, parable)? What was the original language? Look at various translations - do any words have a special meaning? How does the passage relate to the rest of the Bible? For example, is it part of Israel's history, part of Christ's lifetime, part of the history of the early Church after Pentecost?



Commentaries

Consult with a few commentaries. Some examples would be the Word Biblical Commentary series, the Anchor Bible series, or the New International Commentary Series. What are some of the main issues commentators have concerning this passage? Do they focus on any particular verse(s)? How do they think this passage impacts the rest of the Old or New Testament?



Application

In one or two sentences, summarize the main thrust of what the passage is teaching to the readers in their original context? Then apply it to modern day readers. Why is this passage important? How can we apply this to our own lives? How should it affect what we believe, how we treat others, or how we behave? What does this passage teach new and mature Christians? What does it teach to unbelievers? What did it teach you, the writer, about God, His Ways, and His actions in your own life? How did it challenge you?



Final Steps

Take the time to revise, rewrite, and edit. Perhaps go to the Writing Center, see an ACE mentor, or share a rough draft with your instructor. Make sure to format your paper according to the instructor's guidelines. Make sure all resources used are cited appropriately per the style demanded by your instructor (i.e. MLA, APA, or Turabian). Prepare your final draft to turn in by the deadline.