

Exegesis

Exegesis is simply the analysis of a text. Biblical exegesis is not writing a sermon (homiletics). Instead, in an exegesis paper, you analyze the text (using a variety of criteria including, but not limited to, textual, structural, historical, cultural, literary, and theological) toward an informed understanding of the text in question.

Possible Study Plan

The order of study varies, but the goal is to learn as much as possible about the chosen text. As such, you should know the material well. Reread your passage as often as possible. If your professor has not already specified a procedure, this method can be useful in developing your understanding:

- Read your passage several times. Read it slowly. Read it again. Write down your observations and questions. Do not speak to the text, but listen to it.
- If you are not reading the text in the original language, then read several translations of the text to get a basic feeling for the translation difficulties. Write down your observations and questions.
- Read the entire book in which your passage is found. Write down your observations and questions.
- Write a structural outline of the passage. Write down your observations and questions.
- Consider the context of your text (literary, historical, cultural, political, economic, religious, etc.). Using the overview materials and commentaries mentioned below, study the background of what is in the text as well as the background of the time at which the text was written (these are not always the same!). Consider the genre(s) of your text (remember that genres sometimes overlap).
- Consider not just *what* message is conveyed, but also *how* that message is conveyed. Is there repetition, imagery, irony, narrative, poetry, intertextuality, dialogue, etc.?
- Read scholarly overview materials (introductions, encyclopedias, dictionaries), commentaries, and journal articles.
- Read about more specific issues like keywords, translation issues, etc.
- After doing as much research as possible, you can begin to *analyze* your findings in order to *synthesize* your learning into a cohesive argument about your understanding of the passage. Be sure to leave plenty of time for analysis and synthesis. This is where all you have learned comes together in a coherent paper.

“Understanding Scripture should begin by listening to Scripture.” *The first part of the exegetical process is to read your text again, and again, and again, and again.*

Dr. John E. Hartley, “Introduction to Biblical Interpretation” (lecture, Seminar in Biblical Interpretation, Azusa Pacific Seminary, Azusa, Spring 2014.)



Key Issues

- The Society for Biblical Literature (SBL) sets the most common style format for exegesis, but your professor may require a different style in your class (such as Chicago/Turabian).
- Don't let your exegesis become a collection of word studies. Make sure you attend to the style, structure, context, etc. of your passage.

- Translations are either primarily formal (word-for-word) or dynamic (thought-for-thought). Translations on the dynamic end of the spectrum emphasize thought content and impact over direct word correlation. Though paraphrastic translations of the Bible can be helpful for devotional reading, they are not designed for in-depth exegesis. Some examples of Bible paraphrases include *The Message*, *The Living Bible*, *The Good News Bible*, and the *Contemporary English Version*.
- When studying the Bible, it is important to realize the genres within the Bible overlap: prayer texts are also instruction texts, narrative texts also reflect “the experience of God and response to God” that are sometimes more apparent in prayer texts.¹ Different genres answer – and raise – different questions. Regardless of genre, the contents of a biblical book “make clear what were the aims of their writers in relation to the needs they perceived,”² and sharp readers will be aware that a biblical book’s author(s) may have had more than one aim, and a biblical book’s original audience may have had more than one need.
- If you do not find evidence backing up “implications” of the text, do not include them. If nothing else, trust your reader to find an implication aided solely by the clarity of your analysis.
- Allow time to read, take notes, reread, research, draft, review, re-read, revise, rewrite, reread, edit, and proofread your paper. Clarity is vital to good exegesis. Do not procrastinate! Get started, even if you can only take on one small piece at a time.

“Openness to new understanding requires a willingness to yield old convictions.” Don’t be afraid of challenging your beliefs in pursuit of truth.

Dr. John Goldingay, *Key Questions about Biblical Interpretation: Old Testament Answers*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 4.)



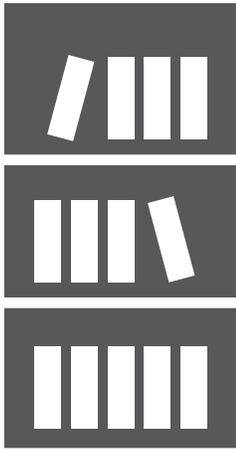
Common Resources

This exegetical process covers many different areas, so it is good to be familiar with the common resources. Resources you use must be academic, should come from the specific field of inquiry (e.g. biblical studies as opposed to theology), and reflect contemporary scholarship.

- 1) **Bible Introductions, Dictionaries, and Encyclopedias:** Introductions give general overviews of biblical books including historical, cultural, and literary contexts. Dictionaries and encyclopedias contain short entries on key words, people, places, events, and concepts related to biblical texts. Use them for studying key words in your passage, including the author, book title, central topics, and key names of people and places. Since they are brief, they can often give an overview of a study or offer a broader consensus on an issue.
- 2) **Commentaries:** Commentaries are available (1) in single volume books published by individual authors and (2) as a series of books by multiple authors and editors covering the entire Bible. Typically, commentaries follow a biblical text verse-by-verse, offering all the knowledge and analysis available from the author(s).
- 3) **Concordances:** A concordance is an index of locations for specific words in the Bible. English concordances are usually keyed to a specific translation, and you may need to cross-reference from your preferred text in order to identify the word in your concordance. Websites and software make concordances readily available, but usually only in-depth exegesis projects will require them.
- 4) **Journal Articles:** Biblical studies is an active field, and new material is always being published in scholarly journals. These resources are often intended for more specialized audiences with greater background in the source languages and the history of the time periods when the texts were produced. They can be difficult to read, but high-level exegesis can benefit from interacting with this most recent scholarship.

¹ Goldingay, *Key Questions*, 5.

² Goldingay, *Key Questions*, 7.



Materials Available in the APU Libraries

- *Baker Exegetical Commentary*
- *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*
- *The Anchor Bible Commentary*
- *The New International Commentary*
- *Africa Bible Commentary: A One-Volume Commentary*
- *Sacra Pagina Commentary*
- *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*
- *Word Bible Commentary*
- And many others!

Sample Outline

- I. Introduction
 - A. Identify passage
 - B. State methodology
- II. Historical Context
 - A. Authorship
 - B. Likely date of composition
 - C. Original audience
 - D. Place in larger history (Israel, Apostolic Age, international context, etc.)
 - E. Events, places, and dates in the text
- III. Literary Context
 - A. Major themes of book
 - B. Place in structure of book
 - C. Literary genre (gospel, epistle, parable, hymn, etc.)
 - D. How other works by the same author shed light on the text
- IV. Textual Analysis
 - A. Formal structure (acrostic, chiasm, narrative, etc.)
 - B. Intertextuality (references in or by the text, parallel comparisons)
 - C. Line-by-line study, flow of thought
 - D. Key words (and translation questions if applicable)
 - E. Theological message or significance
- IV. Summary and Conclusion

Please Note: This is a standard exegesis outline, but it is important to remember that this sample structure may vary depending on what your professor asks for.