

Studying Scripture Exegetically: Striving to Rightly Handle the Word of Truth

I. The Priority of Exegesis

A. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

B. 2 Peter 1:21 “For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

C. 2 Timothy 2:15 “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.”

II. The Definition of Exegesis

A. Definitions of Exegesis

1. “In the privacy of his study the exegete seeks to comprehend the exact meaning of the Bible passage being studied.”¹
2. “The exegetical process takes place in the workshop, the warehouse. It is a process in private, a perspiring task in which the Bible student examines the backgrounds, meanings, and forms of words; studies the structure and parts of sentences; seeks to ascertain the original textual reading (textual criticism); etc.”²
3. “Exegesis will seek to identify the single truth-intention of individual phrases, clauses, and sentences as they make up the thought of paragraphs, sections, and ultimately, entire books.”³

III. The Process of Exegesis

A. Exegesis on the book level

1. Ask questions of the text
2. Who?
 - a. Who is the author?
 - b. Who is the audience?
 - c. Who is the author talking about?
 - d. Example: The Book of Hebrews
3. What?
 - a. What are the primary ideas?
 - b. What are the secondary ideas?
 - c. Example: The Gospels
4. When?

¹ “Basic Bible Interpretation” by Roy Zuck, 21-22.

² “Basic Bible Interpretation” by Roy Zuck, 21.

³ “Toward an Exegetical Theology” by Walter Kaiser Jr., 47.

- a. When was the text written?
- b. To what time period is the text addressing? (Present? Future? Past?)
- c. Example: Old Testament Prophets
- 5. Where?
 - a. Where was the author when this text was written?
 - b. Where was the audience that received this text?
 - c. What locations are addressed in the text?
 - d. What people groups are addressed in the text?
 - (1) Israelites? Egyptians? Moabites? Edomites?
 - (2) Believers or unbelievers?
 - (3) The church or Israel?
 - (4) Example: Paul's Letters
- 6. Why?
 - a. Why is the author writing their book?
 - b. Why is this particular text in the book that the author wrote?
 - c. Why is this particular text in the bible?
 - d. Example: Matthew 1:1-17
- 7. How?
 - a. How is the text structured?
 - b. In what order did the author communicate their ideas?
 - c. What tone does the passage convey?
 - (1) Example: Lamentations
- 8. Resources
 - a. Study Bibles, Bible Handbooks or Bible Backgrounds
- 9. Caution in studying background
 - a. Prioritize background gained from other portions of Scripture
 - b. Not all historical background is gospel truth!
 - (1) Example: Synoptic Gospels

B. Exegesis on the paragraph and sentence level

- 1. Context
 - a. Immediate
 - (1) Matthew 18:20, John 14:13-14, Romans 8:28-29
 - b. Book
 - c. Whole Bible
 - (1) Jeremiah 29:11
- 2. Culture
 - a. Matthew (Tax Collector) and Simon (The Zealot)
 - b. Bible Dictionaries and Encyclopedias
- 3. Comparison/Cross Referencing
 - a. Luke 4:16-21 → Isaiah 61:1-2
 - b. Treasury of Scripture Knowledge
- 4. Historical Background
 - a. Joshua 1 and the Land (Genesis 15)
- 5. Genre

- a. Literary devices in poetry
 - (1) Psalm 19:4-6 “In them [the heavens] he has set a tent for the sun, 5 which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy. 6 Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat.”
- b. Prescription vs. Description in narrative
 - (1) Difference between a description of events taking place and a prescription for us to obey
 - (2) The book of Acts
- c. Prophecy
 - (1) **Peaks of Prophecy**
 - (2) Zechariah 9:9-10 “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. 10 I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.”

6. Grammar

- a. Pay attention to verb tenses (past, present, future)
 - (1) Mark 12:18-27 “I **am** the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”
- b. Pay attention to verb voice (Active, reflexive, or passive)
 - (1) Ephesians 5:18 “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but **be filled** with the Spirit,”
- c. Pay attention to verb mood (Indicative, imperative, subjunctive)
 - (1) Ephesians 1-3 vs. Ephesians 4-6
 - (2) Romans 1-11 vs. Romans 12-16
- d. Pay attention to parts of speech (Verbs, nouns, adjectives, participles, infinitives)
 - (1) Matthew 28:19-20 “**Go** therefore and **make disciples** of all nations, **baptizing** them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 **teaching** them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
- e. Pay attention to subordinate clauses
 - (1) Ephesians 1:15-21

“For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints,

16 I do not cease to give thanks for you,
remembering you in my prayers,

17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him,

18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might 20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.”

7. Word Study

a. 2 Timothy 3:16 “God-breathed”

b. **Blue Letter Bible**

8. Consultation

a. Check Study Bibles

(1) MacArthur Study Bible, ESV Study Bible, NIV Study Bible

b. Check Commentaries

(1) Technical/Academic

(2) Expository/Sermons

(3) Devotional

c. Bible Software

(1) Blue Letter Bible

(2) Bible Gateway

(3) Bible.org

(4) E-Sword

(5) Olive Tree Bible App

(6) Accordance (Mac)

(7) Logos (PC or Mac)

IV. The Product of Exegesis

A. Interpretation

1. After observing the text in rigorous study, we must then ask ourselves, what is the meaning or authorial intention of the text?

2. “What is the main message that the author is trying to communicate to their audience?”

3. By God’s grace, we will come to see more clearly the Holy Spirit’s intention through the human authors

4. Then we will be ready to “rightly handle the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15)