

# Defining Exegetical Theology

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**Abstract:** Exegetical theology is a branch of theology that deals with the exposition and interpretation of the Old and New Testaments. It is a powerful tool when used properly. The significance of exegetical theology is to pursue the practical truth and provide knowledge of resolving interpretive problems. It is for such importance that the purpose of this study pursues to increase the knowledge. Its objectives are to expose the meaning and importance of the “enquiry of the biblical text,” and ...resolve those interpretive problems.” Thus, in this study, learning becomes significant. The study employed “Learning Study” approach so as to gain thorough knowledge. Therefore, one “needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2Timothy 2:15). Acquisition of such knowledge is directly to the biblical researchers, and among many individual preachers of the Word of God, including the Bible readers, as well as theological students.

**Keywords<sup>6</sup>:** Exegetical theology, Old and New Testaments, interpretive problems, learning study approach, knowledge, biblical text.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.0 Introduction

This research study is about “Defining Exegetical Theology.” As a branch of theology, exegetical theology deals with the exposition and interpretation of the Old and New Testaments. In this study, the purpose and objectives are clearly stated; methods and background are all part of chapter one. Chapter two defines exegetical theology and its components. Chapter three discusses biblical exegesis and its processes in understanding the Bible, while chapter four is a concluding chapter. A references list and an appendix are all provided as the sources of the research study.

#### 1.1 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to increase knowledge or skills and bring clear understanding of the exegetical theology to the biblical researchers, and among many individual preachers of the Word of God, the Bible readers, as well as theological students.

#### 1.2 Objectives and aim of the study

The objective of this study is to (a) Expose the meaning and importance of the “enquiry of the biblical text,” in the mind of the biblical researchers, and among many individual preachers, Bible readers and theological students. (b) Resolve interpretive problems in the text. Smith (2007) stated, “Good biblical exegesis meets all the criteria of research. The object of enquiry is the biblical text. Exegetical methods are research methods. Therefore, the objective is to resolve an interpretive problem in the text so as to determine its meaning and significance” (Smith, 2017).

#### 1.2 Methods

The research uses “*Learning Study*” approach as a tool for knowledge impartation. Cheng (2012) explains that,

Learning study is a collaborative action research approach which aims to improve the effectiveness of student learning by enhancing the professional competence of teachers through joint construction of pedagogical content knowledge by teachers to help students to learn specific objects of learning. It provides an authentic learning experience for teachers through an inquiry process, to help them take students' prior knowledge into account in lesson planning so as to create an authentic learning environment for students (Cheng, 2012; cf. Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989).

The advantage of learning study is knowledge acquisition, which “refers to a process of identifying, eliciting, and verifying or validating domain-specific knowledge” (IGI, 2022). The Britannica Dictionary makes a clearly definitive learning study, it states:

The words *learn* and *study*, are closely related to each other. **Learn** means “to gain knowledge or skill by studying” and **study** means “to read, memorize facts, attend school, etc.” When you *study* something, you have not learned it yet. When you are studying something, you are reading books or articles about something you do not know a lot about yet, or using flash cards to memorize facts, or listening to a teacher in a classroom, or watching videos about something so that you can know something or do something well. When you *learn* something, you make it part of the things you know. When you know a lot about a subject, or are very skillful or knowledgeable about something, you have learned it. Learning is gaining knowledge by studying, and studying is done to learn things (The Britannica Dictionary, 2022).

Therefore, The acquisition of “knowledge or skills” of exegetical theology is what is determined in this study, and it’s aimed at biblical researchers, individual preachers, Bible readers, and other theological students who will benefit from the study.

### 1.3 Background

As a branch of theology, the science of exegetical theology deals with the exposition and interpretation of the Bible, including both the Old and New Testaments. One of the questions leading to exegetical theology is whether exegesis is biblical or not, “Is exegesis biblical?” Grace Theological Seminary (2021) traces the exegesis in the early church in the book of Acts, whereas a great persecution broke out. The Christians who were gathered in Jerusalem were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria, thus beginning to fulfill the Great Commission Jesus had given his disciples. Followers of Jesus were literally being hunted down in their homes,

arrested by Saul of Tarsus simply for proclaiming Jesus to be the Messiah. However, despite the persecution, we read about miraculous healings and the Holy Spirit being received by new believers. With such tumultuous events taking place, one may question whether exegetical study was considered important. Enter a chance encounter between Philip and an unnamed Ethiopian eunuch, we're told about this Ethiopian in his position in life and what was currently on his reading list. As it happened, it was Isaiah 53, but listen to his interaction with Philip in the following text:

Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him (Acts 8:30-31).

Philip began with the aforementioned passage from Isaiah the prophet and explained the good news of Jesus to the Ethiopian. He must have been thorough, because the Ethiopian asked to be baptized into the faith when they passed some water. It appears exegetical study was of utmost importance (Grace Theological Seminary, 2021).

On the other hand, Engle (2021) explicitly states that, the word "exegesis" does not appear in the New Testament, but the verb *exageomai*, "to lead out of," does (once each in Luke and John and four times in Acts). Engle also refers to "Alan Cairns' *Dictionary of Theological Terms*," which she calls as the Bible dictionary that affirms a good handful of folks in the Bible for exegesis. The examples given are such as: the disciples who met the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus *exegeted* the events to the other disciples (Luke 24:35). Cornelius *exegeted* his vision to the servants whom he sent to Peter (Acts 10:8). Paul and Barnabas *exegeted* to the Jerusalem council the significance of the miracles and wonders God had done through them among the gentiles (Acts 15:12). Peter *exegeted* to the same gathering God's first outreach to the gentiles through his ministry (Acts 15:14). Finally, Paul *exegeted* to James and the Jerusalem elders "particularly," that is, in detail, what God had done through him among the gentiles (Acts 21:19; Engle, 2021).

Now let's glean into 2Timothy 2:15, evaluate and see whether exegesis is biblical or not. "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, *rightly dividing the word of truth*" (KJV, *emphasis added*). Engle (2021) explains in the above verse that, "It's the tail end of that verse, "rightly dividing the word of truth," which is convincing." According to Paul, we have to do that work, as a worker, not need to be ashamed, "Dividing"- or in the ESV "handling" - God's Word "rightly." Paul's word choice "dividing" in 2Timothy 2:15 was deliberate-it's *orthotomeō* in Greek, which means "to cut straight." It echoes the imagery used of the Word of God as a "double-edged sword" in Hebrews 4:12, a sword Charles Spurgeon says is "not to be played with." Swords are meant to cut and hack, and wound, and kill with, and the word of truth is for pricking men in the heart and killing their sins. The word of God is not committed to God's ministers to amuse men with its glitter, nor to charm them with the jewels in its hilt, but to conquer their souls for Jesus (Engle, 2021).

One biblical hero who exemplified handling God's word rightly is Ezra: "For Ezra had set his heart to *study* the Law of the LORD, and to *do it* and to *teach* his statutes and rules in Israel (Ezra 7:10, *emphasis added*). In Old Testament Exegesis is understood and applied. Engle (2021) recites from DeRouchie's notes, and gives us the order of the exegesis in the following manner:

- *Study* the word.
- *Do* [practice] the word.
- *Teach* the word

Again, Engle admonishes us that, "Before we teach the word to others, we need to practice it," She adds that, "We must practice what we teach and preach. But before we practice and teach the word, we have to know what it says. So we must study it. You must *exegete* it" (Engle, 2021, p.1). We must responsibly and rightly divide God's Word so that we can discover what the author intended for us to understand, then apply it to our lives, and then teach it to

others. Thus, exegesis is not only biblical-it's something we are charged to do (Engle, 2021).  
The following chapter extends the meaning of exegetical theology.

## CHAPTER TWO

### DEFINING EXEGETICAL THEOLOGY

#### 2.0 Defining exegetical theology

##### 2.1 The meaning

The definition of exegesis is the critical explanation or interpretation of a text, especially of scripture. Putting it simply, exegetical theology is the process of discovering the original and intended meaning of a passage of scripture. When considering the importance of knowing truth, exegetical theology is vitally important. (Grace Theological Seminary, 2021, p.1). Broadly, McClintock (2022) defines the “*Exegetical Theology*” as “that branch of theology which treats of the exposition and interpretation of the Old and New Testaments.” The Greek word “Exegesis (ἐξήγησις) is statement, explanation, from ἐξηγέομαι, I lead, describe, explain; and from this, an exegete, ἐξηγητής, guide, interpreter. The word exegetical, then, includes all that belongs to exegesis/on.” That is, “exegetical theology includes all that belongs to the explanation and interpretation of the Holy Scriptures” (McClintock, 2022).

A more clear understanding is given by Engle (2021) when she explained exegesis as “the process of careful analytical study of the Bible to produce useful interpretations of those passages.” (The word “exegesis” comes from the Greek term ἐξηγέομαι (*exegeomai*), which means “to explain” or “to narrate” or “to show the way”). She further states, “The process of exegesis involves asking questions of the text that might unearth new insights. In other words, the goal of exegesis is to know neither less nor more than the information actually contained in the passage. Exegesis ...places no premium on speculation or inventiveness and novelty in interpretation is not prized” (Engle, 2021).

Again Engle (2021) simply states, exegesis is not about discovering what *we* think a text means (or want it to mean) but what the biblical author meant. It’s concerned with intentionality-what the author *intended* his original readers to understand. Citing Naselli, Engle

recites from Naselli that, “Exegesis interprets a text by analyzing what the author intended to communicate. ...For example, when a young lady who is deeply in love with her fiancé receives a letter from him, she reads it carefully. She wants to understand what her fiancé meant. The text means what the text’s author meant” (Engle, 2021). Thus, Engle concludes that, “Good exegesis involves reading God’s Word like that woman read her letter- scrupulously and with the right intent.” Lynn’s Study guide for Biblical Hermeneutics (2017) it is stated that,

The task of exegesis must consider the physical environment in which the passage was cast, the historical background of the passage under review, and the literary forms and vocabulary used to convey the meaning of the passage. We firstly consider physical environment because it is where the culture, geography, or political circumstances are reflected in the author’s writing. Secondly, we look into the historical background pertains to the events that led to the writing itself. If one can discover the occasion for writing, one will be in an improved position to understand both the author’s purpose and the circumstances he addressed with his primary audience (Lynn, 2017, p.10; Ruzige, 2022, pp.8-9).

## **2.2 Exegetical theology and its components**

### *2.2.1 Matter of exegetical theology (McClintock (2022))*

McClintock explains exegetical theology as “the Bible, including both the Old and New Testaments, the material on which the science of exegetical theology is employed.” Additionally, it is described that some writers designate it as Biblical theology; but the real work of exegesis is to gather from the word the material of Biblical theology, leaving the arrangement and coordination of this material to fall into a separate branch of the science. In fact, the results of exegetical study may fall, according to their nature, into historical, doctrinal, or practical theology. As the Bible comes to us as the record of a revelation from God, its claims in this respect form the subject of a separate branch, entitled “Inspiration.” The study of inspiration leads to the general question of the possibility and nature of Revelation (McClintock (2022)). Another following component in which the exegesis involved is the nature of its method.



### 2.2.2 Method of exegetical theology

The exegetical theology employs method that categorizes knowledge in five areas. These involve philology, Archaeology, canon, criticism, and interpretation. The following paragraphs explain the methodological knowledge of these categories.

*Philology:* As the Bible comes to us in ancient languages (Hebrew, Chaldee, Hellenistic Greek), the first requisite of exegesis is the knowledge of these languages, both as to their grammatical structure and their vocabulary. This branch is called *Sacred Linguistics*, or *Sacred philology*. The knowledge of classical Greek is of course presupposed, while Syriac, Samaritan, and Arabic are cognate and auxiliary.

*Archaeology:* Not only does the Bible come to us in ancient languages, but it was also written at various times, in various countries, and under various conditions of life (social, political, religious, etc.). Thus, there is an arise of the various branches of Bible history (belonging partly to exegetical and partly to historical theology), Biblical geography, and chronology, and ethnography, natural history of the Bible, laws, usages, domestic economy, agriculture, sacred rites, and worship. All these branches are summed up under the general title Antiquities, or Archaeology.

*Canon:* As these books come to us claiming to be authoritative, we must be able to answer the question, what books belong to the Bible as a sacred book? The answer to this question gives rise to that branch called the science of the Canon of Scripture. It is divided into canon of the Old and canon of the New Testament.

*Criticism:* Granting that we have certain books admitted to be canonical, the farther question arises, have we these writings in their original and correct forms? The answer to this question gives rise to *Criticism*, which is divided into the lower, or text-criticism, which seeks to ascertain the true and original reading of the text as accurately as possible, and the higher criticism, which examines into the integrity, genuineness, and authenticity of the books. The

higher criticism seeks to distinguish the true from the false, and forms, to a certain degree, the basis of Apologetics; the text-criticism distinguishes the original from the altered or corrupted.

*Interpretation:* All the studies heretofore named are preparatory to the work of getting at the meaning of the sacred Scriptures, which is the function of *interpretation*, or *hermeneutics* (ἐρμηνεύω). The *general* principles on which any other writings would be interpreted are of course applicable here (General Hermeneutics); but the special character of these writings as sacred gives rise to an enlargement of those general principles of interpretation (Sacred Hermeneutics).

When the sense of Scripture is sought simply by the use of linguistics or criticism, the interpretation is called Grammatical. When not only linguistics and criticism, but also all the knowledges embraced above under archaeology are employed, the interpretation is called *Grammatico-Historical*. When, in addition, the traditional sense of the Church as to the substantial facts and doctrines of revelation is brought to bear upon the Word, the interpretation is called *Doctrinal*, or *Dogmatical*.

Finally, when a farther sense than that conveyed in the words of the writer is sought, the interpretation is called *Allegorical*. For the nature, history and value of these, can be found on the study of "*hermeneutics; interpretation*" (McClintock (2022)). A more descriptive knowledge on how to do an exegetical study is provided by Kevin Gary Smith, which is gathered here in the paper by the researcher and it's named as an Appendix A: "*How to do an Exegetical Study*" (pages 21-30). It has an advanced scholarly work, setting a framework for doing exegesis in theological research arena.

### 2.2.3 Results or Products of exegetical theology

McClintock (2022) shows that, the application of the laws of hermeneutics, and of the preparatory or propaedeutic sciences mentioned above, in practical work, is *Exegesis*. The

fruit of this labor may appear, within the sphere of exegetical theology itself, in translations of the Bible, or of any of its parts; or in commentaries on the Bible, or on separate books of the Bible, or on separate passages in any of the books. The principles and rules of exegesis are also to be used by the preacher in the preparation of his discourses for the congregation. This can be seen in “*homiletics; sermon.*”

Most of the topics of exegetical theology are embraced in what is called *Introduction to the Scriptures*, a vague title, formerly much in use, but now giving way to more scientific and distinctive terms, such as *Literary History of the Bible*, for a general name, and the several titles mentioned above for special branches (McClintock (2022)). The following chapter shows how exegetical theology works in the respect of the Bible.

## **CHAPTER TREE**

### **BIBLICAL EXEGESIS AND ITS PROCESSES IN UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE**

### 3.0 Biblical exegesis and its processes in understanding the Bible

#### 3.1 The Difference between exegesis and eisegesis

Engle (2021) clarifies that, “It can be tempting to slide into what’s called “eisegesis” when trying to interpret Scripture. Exegesis and eisegesis sound similarly, but the words themselves give a clue to the difference-namely, in the prefixes “ex-” and “eis-.” Engle expounds that, “Ex-” means to take out of, while “eis-” means “into.” So quite simply, exegesis means digging into the text to pull out the meaning, while its opposite, eisegesis, reads meaning into a text that isn’t there. Students of the Bible must perform solid exegesis, *not* eisegesis, because, “we don’t want to twist Scripture into saying something that it doesn’t actually say” (Engle, 2021). In the “*Principle of Bible Study*,” Ruzige (2021) discusses extensively about these differences between exegesis and eisegesis with a help support from the “Got Questions Ministries,” he explains them as “the two conflicting approaches in Bible study.” That, “exegesis is the exposition or explanation of a text based on a careful, objective analysis while the opposite approach to Scripture is eisegesis, which is the interpretation of a passage based on a subjective, non-analytical reading.” In other words, “the word *eisegesis* literally means “to lead into,” which means the interpreter injects his own ideas into the text, making it mean whatever he wants” (Ruzige, 2021, p.4; Got Questions.org).

Obviously, only exegesis does justice to the text. Eisegesis on the other hand is a mishandling of the text and often leads to a misinterpretation. Exegesis is concerned with discovering the true meaning of the text, respecting its grammar, syntax, and setting. Eisegesis is concerned only with making a point, even at the expense of the meaning of words (Ruzige, 2021, p.4; Got Questions.org). To illustrate the contrasts above, let’s use both approaches in the treatment of one passage: 2Chronicles 27:1-2, “Jotham was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. . . . He did what was right in the eyes

of the LORD, just as his father Uzziah had done, but unlike him he did not enter the temple of the LORD” (Ruzige, 2021, p.5; Got Questions.org).

### *3.1.1 EISEGESIS*

First, the interpreter decides on a topic. Today, it’s “The Importance of Church Attendance.” Then, the interpreter reads 2 Chronicles 27:1-2 and sees that King Jotham was a good king, just like his father Uzziah had been, except for one thing: he didn’t go to the temple! This passage seems to fit his idea, so he uses it. The resulting sermon deals with the need for passing on godly values from one generation to the next. Just because King Uzziah went to the temple every week didn’t mean that his son would continue the practice. In the same way, many young people today tragically turn from their parents’ training, and church attendance drops off. The sermon ends with a question: “How many blessings did Jotham fail to receive, simply because he neglected church?” Certainly, there is nothing wrong with preaching about church attendance or the transmission of values. And a cursory reading of 2 Chronicles 27:1-2 seems to support that passage as an apt illustration (Ruzige, 2021, p.5; Got Questions.org). Kaiser (1991) once said, “Biblical interpretation is one of the most determinative fields of study for the theological task. Any improper moves made in the interpretive mission immediately affect the results obtained in theological construction.” We can infer that, “the above interpretation is totally wrong. For Jotham not to go to the temple was not wrong; in fact, it was very good, as the proper approach to the passage will show” (Ruzige, 2021, p.5; Got Questions.org).

### *3.1.2 EXEGESIS*

First, the interpreter reads the passage and, to fully understand the context, he reads the histories of both Uzziah and Jotham (2Chronicles 26-27; 2Kings 15:1-6, 32-38). Then, in his observation, he discovers that King Uzziah was a good king who nevertheless disobeyed the Lord when he went to the temple and offered incense on the altar-something only a priest had the right to do (2Chronicles 26:16-20). Uzziah's pride and his contamination of the temple resulted in his having "leprosy until the day he died" (2Chronicles 26:21). Needing to know why Uzziah spent the rest of his life in isolation, the interpreter studies Leviticus 13:46 and does some research on leprosy. Then he compares the use of illness as a punishment in other passages, such as 2Kings 5:27; 2Chronicles 16:12; and 21:12-15. By this time, the exegete understands something important: when the passage says Jotham "did not enter the temple of the LORD," it means he did not repeat his father's mistake. Uzziah had proudly usurped the priest's office; Jotham was more obedient. The resulting sermon might deal with the Lord's discipline of His children, with the blessing of total obedience, or with our need to learn from the mistakes of the past rather than repeat them. Of course, exegesis takes more time than eisegesis. But if we are to be those unashamed workmen "who correctly handle the word of truth," then we must take the time to truly understand the text. Exegesis is the only way (Ruzige, 2021, pp.5-6, Got Questions.org).

Again, Engle tells us that, "We might not always like what the Bible says, but we must resist trying to explain away anything [we] don't like as 'culture bound' or in some way irrelevant to modern society." She further gives us a warning from Henry Blackaby saying, "Proper exegesis requires guarding against taking verses or passages out of context or doing irresponsible word studies that lead to misleading conclusions to fit what we want Scripture to mean" (Engle, 2021). With a point of emphasis Engle, reminds us that, "we're searching for what the *author* intended for it to mean." Now, having clarified the contrast between exegesis

and eisegesis, the following proposition is a question about the contrast between “exegesis and hermeneutics.”

### 3.2 The Contrast between exegesis and hermeneutics

From the study course of “*Biblical hermeneutics*” authored by Lynn (2017) for post graduate studies, biblical exegesis, basically is “the interpretative processes that can involve a whole book of the Bible or a portion thereof, such that, a pericope should be harmonious with the greater portion of the book” (Lynn, 2017, p. 6). Biblical Hermeneutics determines what application should be made for the present day by defining a secondary task of the course. That, the endeavor recognizes three audiences in the interpretative process: (1) an original audience, (2) a secondary audience, and (3) a present-day audience. The original audience would have been the people, to whom an oracle, law, or statement was first directed, often in oral form. The secondary audience would be the wider ancient audience for whom a biblical composition was directed in written form. The present day audience includes the contemporary reader (Lynn, 2017, p.6).

In supporting this, Eagle (2021) explains that “though they might seem similar, there’s a slight difference between exegesis and hermeneutics. Hermeneutics focuses on *principles* of interpretation-how the interpretive process works, the “rules” necessary for searching out meaning. On the other hand, exegesis applies those principles.” In other words, “Hermeneutics may be regarded as the theory that *guides* exegesis; and exegesis may be understood ... to be the practice of and the set of procedures for discovering the author’s intended meaning” (Eagle, 2021).

Having discussed the contrasts above, it is now clear that, “exegesis” is concerned with the text in its original setting, and “hermeneutics” is concerned with contemporary application, signifying the interpretation of literary texts in its fullest measure. Hermeneutics describes the practice of explaining a text, following sound and proven principles. In broader and classical

sense, it covers both exegesis and application (Lynn, 2017, p.10). Poor hermeneutics lead to poor interpretation of the Bible. As an interpreter, when doing biblical exegesis, one should be able to grapple with the text to find its uniqueness. If we want to come up with good hermeneutics, “We should seek the author’s agenda, not our own” (Lyn, 201, p.18). All these show us how the process of biblical exegesis is very important to us both in interpreting the Hebrew and Greek scriptures.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**



## **CONCLUSION**

### **4.0 Conclusion**

Exegetical theology, as a branch of theology, delights in the exposition and interpretation of both Old and New Testaments. “Putting it simple, it is the process of discovering the original and intended meaning of a passage of scripture. When considering the importance of knowing truth, exegetical theology is vitally important” (Grace Theological Seminary, 2021, p.1). Exegetical theology is powerful tool when used properly.

Therefore, Apostle Paul admonishes us that, “We should be diligently presenting ourselves approved to God, workers who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2Timothy 2:15).

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## APPENDIX A

## How to do an exegetical study<sup>7</sup>

By Kevin Gary Smith

Biblical exegesis is an in-depth, inductive examination of a text of scripture in which the exegete systematically applies established hermeneutic tools (exegetical methods) to discover the meaning and implications of a text of a biblical text (or group of texts).

Good biblical exegesis meets all the criteria of research. The object of enquiry is the biblical text. Exegetical methods are research methods. The objective is to resolve an interpretive problem in the text so as to determine its meaning and significance.

Although this chapter offers some guidelines for an exegetical procedure, its goal is to provide a framework for doing exegesis as theological research. For detailed treatment of exegetical procedures, students should consult some of the many excellent exegetical guides (e.g., Stuart 1984; Fee 1993).

### Presuppositions of evangelical exegesis

As interpreters, we all approach the biblical text with a set of presuppositions that govern our exegesis. Since these presuppositions influence our exegesis, we should state them openly. My hermeneutic presuppositions influence the method presented in this chapter. If your views differ significantly from mine, you should still find the chapter helpful, but you may need to adapt it. These are my convictions:

1. The scriptures are the inspired Word of God and are inerrant in the autographs.
2. The primary goal of biblical interpretation is to discover the author- intended meaning, that is, the message the Holy Spirit led the human author to convey to the original readers. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit-guided the writing process to ensure the intended message is faithfully communicated in writing.<sup>8</sup>
3. Each text has one primary author-intended meaning; therefore, each passage can have only one correct interpretation. I reject all forms of *sensus plenior* (multiple meanings), especially the idea that the text can mean something to us that it could never have meant to its original readers.
4. The Bible should be interpreted literally, that is, at face value according to the normal rules of communication (i.e., grammatical- historical exegesis).
5. Although a text has only one meaning, it may have many valid applications.

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<sup>7</sup> I wish to express my gratitude to Dr. Noel Woodbridge whose research and suggestions provided the foundation for this chapter.

<sup>8</sup> In ordinary communication, this is often not true. What I say may not accurately represent what I intend to communicate. Because the Holy Spirit superintended the writing of the Scriptures, he ensured that the human authors wrote exactly what he intended.

The applications derive from the one meaning; they are concrete applications of the same timeless truth.

6. Exegesis must be relevant and valuable to today's believers. To complete his work, an exegete must move from interpretation to application, from the past to the present, from the there-and-then to the here-and-now.

These convictions underlie my approach to exegetical studies. If your presuppositions differ significantly, you may need to adjust the model I am about to present.

### **Design for an exegetical study**

Whether it is a 10-page term paper, a 100-page thesis or a 300-page dissertation, an exegetical study has five main parts: (1) introduction, (2) context, (3) meaning, (4) significance and (5) conclusion. In a term paper, these would be sections of the paper. In a thesis, each might be one chapter. In a dissertation, each part could require several chapters.

**Section 1: The introduction**

The opening section provides framework for the study. It covers such elements as the boundaries of the passage, the reason for selecting it, problems in the text, scholarly views (short literature review) on the passage and its problems, a brief description of the research approach and an overview of the remainder of the study.

- *The passage.* Explain your reasons for choosing the text and how you delimited its boundaries.
- *The objectives.* The general objective of exegesis is to expose the meaning and significance of the biblical text. If your exegesis will focus on particular exegetical problems in the text, describe them; your objective will be to solve these problems.
- *The perspectives.* Summarise the major scholarly perspectives on text, especially vastly different approaches and alternate solutions to exegetical problems.
- *The plan.* Preview the remainder of the study, describing the approach, methodology and structure.

**Section 2: The context**

This part deals with all aspects relevant to the historical and the literary contexts of the book in which the selected passage is located. Most exegetical studies require a section devoted to the book in which the passage is located. This section should cover whichever of these elements are relevant to the research:

- *The general background of the book.* The general background encompasses issues related to the *authorship*, *date* and *audience* (recipients) of the book. Unless these matters are crucial to the argument, they can be addressed fairly briefly in the thesis.
- *The historical context of the book.* The historical context relates primarily to the quest for the *occasion* and *purpose* of the book. A secondary aspect of this section is to explain any aspects of the historical setting (milieu) of the book that are crucial to understanding its message.

- *The literary context of the book.* At this level, the literary context has to do with the book's *structure* and *argument* (i.e., flow of thought). How an interpreter understands the overall structure and argument of the book has an influence on how he understands the meaning of the passage.
- *The theological themes of the book.* For some studies, a survey of the major *themes* and *motifs* of the book is necessary. In particular, this section should analyze what the whole book teaches about themes relevant to the focal point of the selected passage.

### **Section 3: The meaning** – (Biblical Evidence, *mine emphasis*)

This section is the heart of the exegetical study, consisting of an in-depth analysis of the text.

1. *Preliminary analysis.* The preliminary exegetical work entails two main tasks: analyze textual variants and translate the passage.
  - *Textual criticism.* Examine textual variants and discuss any meaningful ones.
  - *Translation.* If you are familiar with the original language, it is valuable to produce your own translation of the passage. Where difficult translation decisions have to be made, the translation should include notes explaining the problem, listing translation options and motivating the choice. If you are unable to produce your own translation, you may substitute by comparing various good translations. Write out the text of the translation you will be using as your main text together with notes discussing significant alternate renderings.<sup>9</sup>
2. *Contextual analysis.* Study the immediate historical and literary context of your pericope. You should give due attention to whichever of these aspects of the pericope context are relevant:

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<sup>9</sup> The translation is usually done in two phases. At the start of your study, produce a provisional translation. Then, after you have conducted an in-depth study, go back and refine the translation in the light of your observations.

- *Historical setting.* Determine the underlying historical occasion the author was addressing and analyze any historical or cultural allusions in the text.
  - *Literary context.* Examine attention to the literary context of the passage, which includes the immediate context, the book context and the canonical context.
3. *Verbal analysis.* Investigate the actual words in the passage, their meaning (lexical analysis) and relationships (grammatical analysis).
- *Lexical.* Analyze the meaning of key words and phrases to discover their significance in the text.
  - *Grammatical.* Examine any significant grammatical features in the passage (e.g., verb tenses, genitive phrases, conditional clauses, etc.).
4. *Literary analysis.* Examine the literary features of the passage to determine their influence on the meaning of the passage. Under the banner of “literary features” we include:
- *Genre.* Identify the general and specific genre of the passage and how it impacts upon the interpretation of the text; for example, if the text is Matthew 8:18-22, the general genre is “gospel”, while the specific genre is “pronouncement story”.
  - *Structure.* Analyze the relationship between parts of the passage; techniques such as sentence diagrams or semantic structure analyses are helpful.
  - *Composition.* For some texts and some studies, matters relating to traditions, sources, redaction and life-settings require investigation.
  - *Rhetoric.* Examine the stylistic features of the text that may influence its meaning; these include compositional techniques such as figures of speech, repeated words, catch phrases and markers of emphasis.
4. *Exegetical synthesis.* In this section, you should begin to pull together your exegetical findings. The primary question you want to answer here is this: What was the author trying to communicate to his readers through the text? To answer this question, you might need to answer such questions as these:
- What are the major concerns or issues being addressed in the passage?

- What is the impact of the combination of genre, literary devices and structure on the meaning of the passage?
- What is the relationship between the motifs and the concerns of the passage?
- What is the relation of these motifs and concerns to the historical setting of the book?

#### **Section 4: The significance**

No exegetical thesis is complete until it addresses the contemporary significance of the passage, answering the question: What difference does it make? This section may explore two kinds of significance:

- (a) Theology and/or
- (b) Application.

1. *Theology: the doctrinal significance of the passage.* Here the thesis should expound what the passage teaches us (a) about God, (b) about creation (especially ourselves) and (c) the relationship between God and creation.

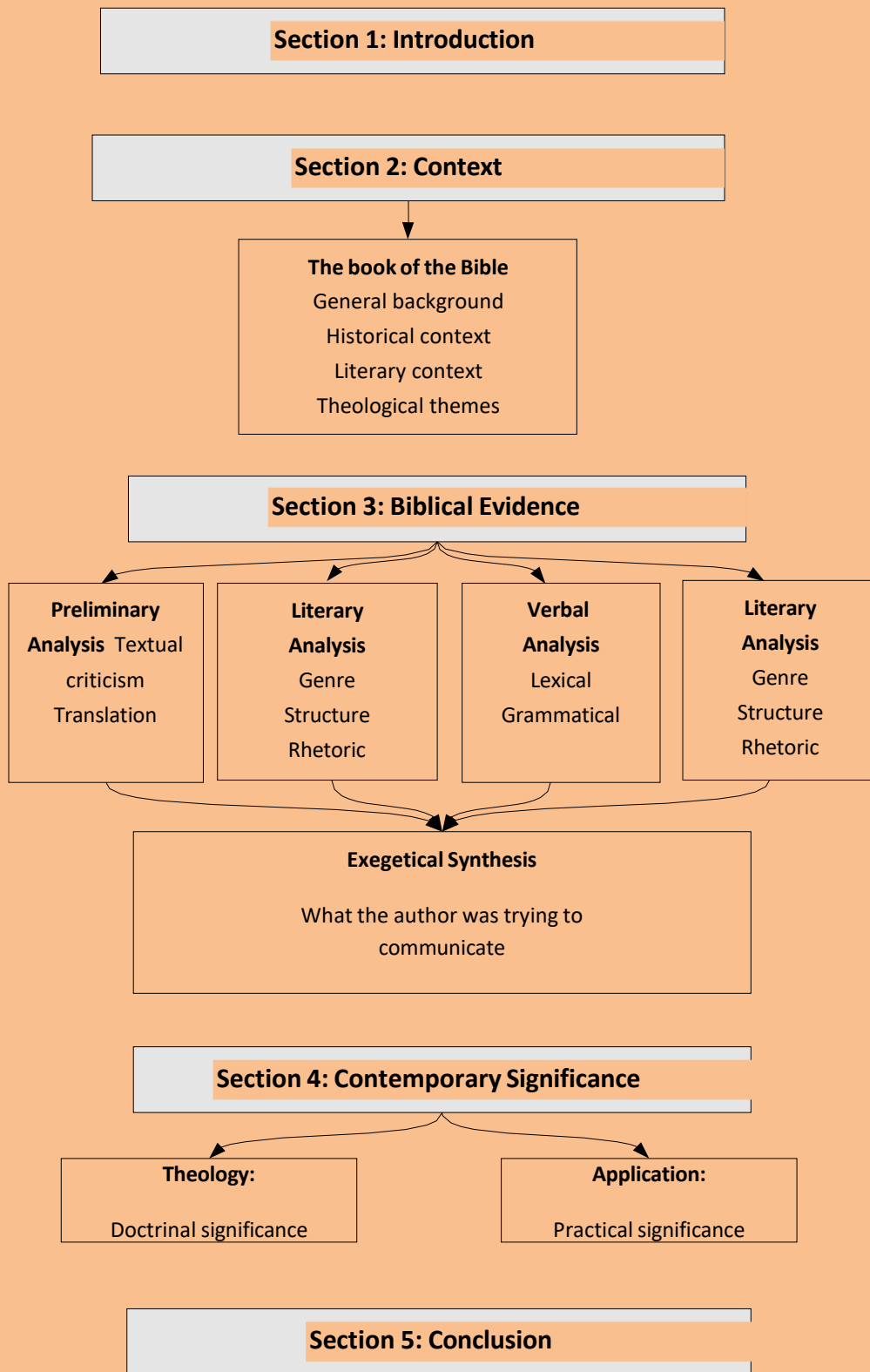
- What universal truths (principles) does the passage teach?
- How does it harmonize with the whole teaching of Scripture?
- What contribution does it make to Christian doctrines?

2. *Application: the practical significance of the passage.* The study should make *at least one application* of the passage to contemporary Christianity. The application should focus on the central idea in the exposition of the passage.

- Identify the target group at which your application is aimed. Then give attention to how (a) the original meaning of the text can be explained to them and (b) you can help them connect with the truths of the text.
- Identify how the text applies to today's situation. The focus may be upon (a) the life of the individual Christian and/or (b) the life and ministry of the church.

In many institutions, exegetical studies do not include a major section on the significance of the text. Students are permitted to leave the research in the there-and-then without building bridges to the here-and-now. In my opinion, exegesis is not complete until it links the biblical text with the real work, the past with the present, allowing the ancient message to speak to our modern context. Since not all professors require (or even desire) this component, I recommend you ask your professor what he expects.





*Illustration 1: Design for exegetical research*

## Section 5: The conclusion

The conclusion may or may not be a separate section of the study. In some exegetical studies, the significance section *is* the conclusion. It briefly summarizes the exegetical findings, and then closes with a discussion of the significance (doctrinal and/or practical) of those findings. In other studies, the conclusion is a separate, short section summarizing the problem, process and findings of the study and possibly proposing further research.

## Writing up an exegetical study

How should you write up an exegetical study? The answer depends somewhat on the length of the study. The exegetical design presented above outlines the logic of the study and the elements that typically fall under each main section, but it does not dictate the outline of the study. The most common way to organize the report on an exegetical study is what we call the commentary structure.

***The commentary structure:*** This approach moves through the passage verse-by-verse, presenting relevant exegetical insights as they occur in the pericope. It needs an introduction section and a section discussing the overarching background issues, but it presents most of the exegetical details in the verse-by-verse discussion. The historical, cultural, redactional, grammatical, lexical and other types of observations are integrated in the commentary. Discussion of the significance, doctrinal and/or practical, may be integrated into the commentary or it may remain a separate section.

***An exegetical structure:*** An exegetical study can be organized under the following categories:

1. Introduction
  - 1.1. The passage
  - 1.2. The problems
  - 1.3. The perspectives
2. Context of the book
  - 2.1. General background: author, date and audience
  - 2.2. Historical context: occasion, purpose and milieu
  - 2.3. Literary structure: structure and argument
  - 2.4. Theological: themes and motifs
3. Exegesis of the passage
  - 3.1. Text and translation
    - Present the working translation of the text (your own or an existing one) followed by notes discussing relevant textual variants and translation alternatives.
  - 3.2. Meaning for the original readers

- Move through the text verse-by-verse discussing all the points relevant to its meaning, such as key words, grammar, customs, geography, rhetoric, redaction, etc.

### 3.3. Significance for today's readers

4. Conclusion
5. Bibliography

An alternative to a commentary arrangement is a topical arrangement. This is less popular, but well suited to certain studies.

### **The topical structure**

An alternative structure, a topical outline, uses each step in the exegetical process as a heading (or, in longer studies, a chapter). So, for example, under *grammatical analysis* you discuss all important grammatical features; composition might be discussed under a heading such as *redaction criticism*. The name “topical outline” derives from the fact that the analysis of the text is discussed under topics or in categories. A topical study could be arranged under headings such as:

1. Introduction
2. Text and translation
3. Exegetical analysis
4. Contemporary significance
5. Conclusion
6. Bibliography

The body of the study falls under the heading “exegetical analysis” on the outline. This section presents exegetical data arranged under headings that represent steps in the exegetical process. The nature of the study dictates which headings are included. Any exegetical process might be used as a heading (e.g., lexical analysis, grammatical analysis, form criticism, literary context, discourse features, historical context, etc.).

### **Summary**

Exegesis is a form of research. Its general objective is to uncover the text's author-intended meaning for the original readers and its significance for today's church. On occasions, its specific objective is to solve a particular interpretive problem in the passage. To achieve these objectives, it deploys a variety of exegetical methods as its research methods.

A detailed exegetical analysis of the chosen pericope lies at the heart of exegetical research. Preliminary study of the book in which the passage is located lays a foundation for the exegesis, while exploring its doctrinal and/or practical significance links the exegesis to the present.

There are two acceptable ways of writing up an exegetical study, namely, the commentary style and the topic approach. The commentary method proceeds verse-by-verse, presenting exegetical observations as they relate to the text. The topical approach arranges the main body of the study under topical heading.