

## Step-by-Step Guide for Doing Exegesis

First, be certain that you fully understand the instructions for your assignment, since exegetical work can vary from person to person. *Do not be afraid to ask questions.*

Next, understand the process. Typically exegetical work will include some or all of the following:

- Orienting the passage (pericope) in the context of the Biblical book as a whole.
- Examining the passage's literary style, its grammar, and word choices (lexical/concordance work).
- Orienting the passage in its historical and cultural context.
- Asking questions of the passage (critical analysis) based on what you have discovered thus far.
- Considering the theology of the passage, its theological implications.
- Forming your own observations and thoughts about the passage. Remember, everyone brings unique insights to the Bible. There is no right, wrong, or "but they're smarter than me."
- Turning to commentaries to learn how others have interpreted the passage.

**Librarian's Tip:** Each of the tasks that follow can be accomplished using the **BibleWorks** program available on several Bridwell computers. Please note, however, that BibleWorks is fairly sophisticated software that beginners sometimes find daunting. A guide to starting out with it is available on Bridwell's reference web page.

Finally, jump in and do it! Here's how:

- 1) Look at the scholarly notes and introductions in your own study Bible for clues on interpretation.
- 2) Compare different English translations of your passage. You can do this online via Bible Gateway, <http://www.biblegateway.com/versions/>, New Testament Gateway <http://www.ntgateway.com/>, or Old Testament Gateway <http://www.otgateway.com/>. Note that Bible Crosswalk (<http://www.biblestudytools.com/versions/>) is one of the few public sites that includes the NRSV. There are good print parallels that accomplish this as well: the *Complete Parallel Bible* and Throckmorton's *Gospel Parallels*, are two examples. Note any differences in the ways various words have been translated.

- 3) Do the concordance work. Concordances are keyed to a particular version of the Bible, so confirm that you have the right concordance for the translation you are using. It allows you to identify a particular word in Scripture, learn its root in the original language, and trace its use throughout the Bible, thereby identifying important themes.
- 4) Consider why your passage is written in the style it is. What might that mean? Does the grammar and vocabulary it employs conform to what you know of the time and place it was written? What are the text's outstanding features? Does it employ any rhetorical or poetic devices?
- 5) Get a feel for the historic and cultural context of your passage through Bible dictionaries, encyclopedias, and atlases. Sadly, many of the best are not available online, but can be found in print: *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, etc. Other useful titles, not specifically geared to the Bible, are available online through the SMU Library Catalog including: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, *Encyclopedia of Religion*, *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*,
- 6) Stop and think about what you have learned so far. Are certain aspects of the passage starting to draw your attention? What thoughts are emerging as you consider it? What questions occur to you? What are the theological implications, if any, of the passage?
- 7) Finally, start to explore the **commentaries** available to you. Critical commentaries are scholarly works that discuss the background, context and interpretation of a section of scripture. They can be entire books or articles in journals.

**Librarian's Tip:** Exercise extreme **caution** in working with free online websites. Many of the commentaries, etc., available online for free are out of copyright, which means they were published decades ago. They are dreadfully out of date and will not please your professor.

Most book-length commentaries are available in print only. These will either be in the Reference (Green) Room or in the circulating collection. You can check the location in the Library Catalog.

There are also some electronic versions available through NetLibrary. You can best find these by doing an advanced catalog search. Enter 'commentary' and 'Genesis' (or other book) into the search fields, and limit location to 'Online Resources.'

Depending on your topic, you may want to consult either *Old Testament Abstracts* or *New Testament Abstracts*. As the titles suggest, these resources will tell you that a work (book, article, review, software, etc.) on your topic exists, and provide you with an abstract, or brief summary of its content. You can then search the Library Catalog to see if Bridwell has that item.

For journal articles on Biblical passages, please refer to the guide "Accessing ATLA Religion Database through EbscoHost" (also available on the Bridwell Reference site, if you misplace the handout). Many articles are available in full text.

Guides to scholarly citations, such as Turabian and *Chicago Manual of Style*, are available in the Reference (Green) Room. These will help you format your footnotes properly. While everyone remembers to footnote quotations, many neglect to footnote key concepts or unique ideas derived from the works of others. While it is not necessary to footnote generally accepted knowledge, it is essential to give proper credit to those who have come up with new and significant interpretations.

When in doubt, it is best to ask. Jane and Christine are available at the Bridwell Reference Desk at 214-768-4046 M-F, 8am-6pm. Or you can chat with us online (separate from the main library chat service) <http://smu.edu/bridwell/ask>.

The Bridwell Circulation Desk anytime that the library is open (214-768-1866). They can answer circulation questions as well as basic reference questions.

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