



A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR  
*Exegesis & Theology*

THIS GUIDE INCLUDES:

- List of recommended study aids
- Steps on how to dive deeper into God's Word
- Connections between exegesis and theology



# Exploring Exegesis

## WHAT IS EXEGESIS (EX·E·GE·SIS)?

Exegesis is the interpretation of biblical texts (i.e. Scripture) by drawing meaning out the text and analyzing what the author intended to communicate. The word exegesis simply means "to lead out of." In essence, through exegesis, the interpreter is led to conclusions by simply following the text according to normal literary rules.

## WHY IS EXEGESIS IMPORTANT IN BIBLE STUDY?

Exegetical Bible study methods are important because they help us to rightly handle (2 Timothy 2:15) and understand the Bible. God's Word is sacred and precious. His message to His people is clear, consistent and without error. More specifically, although the Scriptures were written by men, God is the author of the entire Bible. God the Holy Spirit inspired men to write the Holy Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16) and we must be diligent students of the Bible if we desire to know and discern what the Spirit is speaking. In our flesh, we are capable of misinterpreting and misapplying those things that the Spirit says. By digging deeper into God's Word through exegesis, we are being careful to listen and truly understand what the Spirit is saying to us. God will never lead us to believe something that is contradictory to His Word. Overall, the Scriptures are a tool used by the Holy Spirit to teach, rebuke, correct and train us in righteousness, so that we may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Lastly, intentional and thorough Bible study is not a means to replace the work of the Holy Spirit. Knowledge of the Bible is spiritually unprofitable to a person not indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We must recognize that the truth of God is revealed through Scripture & applied through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit speaks through the Scriptures to teach us the truths of God and it is impossible to learn and understand these truths without His work.

## CAN I REALLY LEARN HOW TO DO THIS?

YES, you can! In Ephesians 1:16-19 our brother Paul says, "I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, 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, 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, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe." Dear sister, I am praying the same for you and I am confident in God's great ability to lead and guide you through His Word! I invite you to trust Him and dive in!



# Let's Get Started!

There are several items that you should consider gathering before you begin your study. These resources will be beneficial in helping you to properly understand the text of the Bible. (Note: It takes a while to build a library of Bible study resources. Don't worry if you cannot get all of these at once; start with a good study bible and build from there. Also, on the last page of this guide I have listed websites that you can utilize to access most of the resources mentioned below. Much of what is listed can be accessed for FREE).

**Study Bible** - A study Bible provides detailed information to help the reader better understand the context of the Scripture. Additionally, it is primarily beneficial in helping the student answer background questions associated with the book of study. The ESV study is one of several good study Bibles that I recommend.

**Concordance** - Strong's Concordance is recommended. This resource is a complete alphabetical listing of all the words in the Bible. A concordance is useful in helping to clarify the meanings of words in their proper context.

**Lexicons** - Lexicons are the linguistic tools used to assist in defining the meanings of words. Lexicons are similar to dictionaries in that they help to explain the meaning of Hebrew and Greek words. The top lexicon for Hebrew (OT) to English translation is the "Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament" (known as the HALOT) and the top lexicon for Greek (NT) to English translation is the "Greek - English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (known as the BDAG).

**Bible Dictionaries and Bible Encyclopedias** - These resources work like a general standard dictionary or encyclopedia except the words and topics are derived from Scripture. Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias are great tools for finding out more information, subjects, and terms so that you can gain a better idea of what is occurring in the text. A regular dictionary will also work as a great substitute.

**Maps** - Many study Bibles have maps in them. I personally use the maps found in my Illustrated Study Bible. Maps are useful in showing where events happen. They are beneficial in broadening your perspective as it pertains to location.

**Interlinear Bible** - This Bible provides the Hebrew (OT) or Greek (NT) with literal translation for each word placed below the word, as well as the Strong's Concordance number above each word. This resource assists with a more intense study of the original languages of the Bible. As you get more experienced in exegesis, this is a great investment. However, this is not required for beginners.

**Commentaries** - Commentaries are useful in examining what others have observed about a passage of Scripture. While commentaries are excellent resources, BE CAREFUL WHEN USING THEM! Commentaries should be used only after you've diligently walked through the steps of exegetical study.

**Pens, Highlighters, and Color Pencils** - These tools are useful in making notes, highlighting, and annotating the text as you study.

**A printed copy of the text** - this copy should be double-spaced w/ wide margins and include footnotes and cross-references. Often times the space in our Bibles is simply not enough to make notes and annotate; therefore, it is beneficial to print the text in a format where you can do this. Journaling Bibles are also helpful in this regard. If you need help with formatting a text to print, please email us at [info@sheshallbecalled.com](mailto:info@sheshallbecalled.com) and we'll assist you!

## Before You Dive In...

1. Pray as you study. Walking into your Bible study without prayer is very naive. In John 6:63, Jesus said, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all..." You need the Holy Spirit to help you rightly understand and apply the truths of God. You cannot do this alone! Pray that the Spirit will guide you piece by piece through your study and illuminate your mind. Be sure to carry a posture of prayer throughout the entirety of your study.
2. As you read each passage of Scripture, keep in mind the overarching biblical storyline of **creation-fall-redemption-restoration**. Examine how the studied passage fits into this grand storyline.
3. Remember these simple tips: **Interpret Scripture by Scripture**. When encountering passages that appear to be contradictory or difficult to understand, interpret less clear passages of Scripture in light of clearer passages. **Interpret Scripture in a literal sense**. R.C. Sproul explains, "Parables are interpreted as parables, symbols as symbols, poetry as poetry, didactic literature as didactic literature, historical narrative as historical narrative, occasional letters as occasional letters. That principle of literal interpretation is the same principle we use to interpret any written source responsibly" (Sproul 2011). **Interpret Scripture as the infallible and inerrant Word of God**. We are not called to argue against biblical truths that we don't understand. We are to humbly submit to God's Word and be completely confident that Scripture is flawless. (Note: Don't feel as if you have to immediately settle upon an interpretation of a passage. Although Scripture is inerrant, sometimes our interpretations are not. Don't rush into drawing conclusions on a particular passage. Sometimes it may take a while to gain a clear understanding of a passage, and that's okay!)
4. Be patient as you study. Take time to meditate on the Bible. Focus on words, phrases, sentences, whole passages, and how all of Scripture is connected. Do not try to cram information into your brain. Bible study is a humble opportunity to learn more about our triune God; it's a life-long process that should not be rushed.
5. Examine the background of the text using your study Bible and any supplementary resources that are available to you. Ask the following:
  - (1) *Who wrote it?*
  - (2) *When was it written?*
  - (3) *To whom was it written?*
  - (4) *In what style (genre) was it written?*
  - (5) *Why was it written?*
6. Remember to study the Bible in a community of other believers (when possible). Life as a Christian includes living and fellowshiping with the body of Christ. We were designed to function together. Studying with others is wise, profitable, and keeps us accountable.
7. Commit to being a good interpreter of God's Word. Study responsibly, not with the intent to be a "know-it-all" but with the purpose of truly beholding God. Seek to grow in your knowledge of Him and your love for Him. Seek to grow in grace and seek to glorify Him purely. Continue to devotedly study and trust that God will faithfully lead you through His Word.



# Steps of Exegetical Study

## GRASP THE TEXT: WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. Start with reading the entire selected book of study from start to finish. You can either read in one sitting, or you can break the book down into passages to read over several days. After reading at least once, begin reading again. This time, compare different Bible translations (i.e. KJV, ESV, NLT, etc). Note the genre\* of the text (there may be more than one genre illustrated throughout the entire book). Examining the genre helps to provide guidelines on how the text should be read and rightly understood (more info on biblical genres can be found here: <https://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-genres.html>). Also, feel free to use your worksheet to write out your thoughts as you read.

\*Helpful hints about biblical genres: 1) Almost half of the Bible is written narratively. In general, narratives should be read "as is" (just like you'd read a factual book). Don't over-spiritualize what you are reading. Simply read and soak in the information. Additionally, narratives can be useful in gaining knowledge about the people, setting, and culture of that time. In reading narratives, be sure to distinguish between the descriptive (texts that describe how an event happened) and prescriptive (texts that provide instruction to be implemented). Sometimes teaching found in narratives may be explicitly written, while some teaching may be implicit. 2) Parables/storytelling are carefully used to illustrate a particular point. Jesus told parables, not for the sake of simply telling a story, but to make a point. Read parables with the intent to note the point as opposed to making the story literal (Wilkin, 68). Figures of Speech should also not be taken literally but in accordance with what the author intended to communicate.

As you read, note the following:

- Does the text contain repeated words, phrases, or thoughts? Mark repetitive words/phrases in the same color or annotate in the same style.
  - Does the text mention attributes of God (things that are true about God's character)?
  - Does the text make several points in a row? List each point on your worksheet.
  - Note any words that you do not understand. Look them up in the dictionary or lexicon and write a more understandable definition on your worksheet.
  - Are there any cross-referenced Scriptures associated with the passage of study? Read them and note the connections.
  - Does the passage make an argument? Are there any if/then arguments? Draw arrows to link any connected arguments.
  - Are you confused by any part of the passage? Note the confusing portion and write out your question to address during group study. (Wilkin, 93).
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# Steps of Exegetical Study

## INTERPRET THE TEXT: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

After grasping or understanding the text, now we can begin to inductively ask, “**What does this passage of Scripture mean?**”

1. Examine the biblical context. Note how the selected passage relates to the surrounding passages of Scripture, the chapter, the book, and lastly the entire Bible. Read the cross-references and observe the footnotes of the text. Compare the cross-references with the passage of study.
2. Examine the historical context. Determine the underlying circumstances the author was addressing. Understand culture when the author wrote the passage. Make note of any historical-cultural things mentioned in the text. The meanings of words/phrases can be shaped by the historical and cultural context in which they are used, so we must examine the setting rightly so that we can interpret rightly.
3. Examine literary context. Note the meaning of the words: nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc. (Using a lexicon or dictionary at this point can be very helpful). Examine the sentence structure. As well as the passage structure. Context is key! Be sure to examine what the passages mean in context. Read the passages surrounding the selected passage of study. Examine how the wording of the passage impacts the meaning and interpretation of the passage. This is very important as it helps us to understand if the meaning of the text is literal or figurative, descriptive or prescriptive, etc. Consider the structure of the sentences, the definition of terms, and the functions of the various parts of speech. The definition of words and sentence structure can provide clarity on what the author has written.
4. Write the text in your own words. Take a moment to wrestle with the meaning of the passage, then use your supplementary worksheet to write the meaning of the passage in your own words.

## APPLY THE TEXT: HOW SHOULD THIS CHANGE ME?

Examine how the passage of Scripture applies to you. Note: this is not an opportunity to inject your own meaning into the text. Simply examine all that you have learned from studying the text and note how it is practically applicable to Christian life today. Ask the following:

- How does this passage of Scripture APPLY to me/us today?
- What is God saying to the Church, the world, and to me personally through His Word?
- What does this passage teach me about God? How does passage shape my view of God?
- How does this passage shape my view of self?
- How should I respond to the teaching provided in this passage?
- Consider the original audience of the message. In what ways does the message apply similarly to us today? In what way does the message apply differently?

Note: Questions outlined in these sections are not exhaustive, but they are designed to help you develop your personal Bible study time.



# Connecting Exegesis to Theology

There is an undoubted connectedness between exegesis and theology. What we gather from the Scriptures during our exegetical study, will ultimately shape our theology. After studying the text thoroughly, begin to examine the following:

**Biblical Theology:** The Bible in its entirety was written to illustrate the redemptive work of God. Correctly studying and understanding the Bible is essential to developing solid biblical theology. Remember that all parts of the Bible fit together to form a larger picture. Therefore, when exegeting Scripture we should understand what the passage says about God and humanity, and their relationship. All in all, the content of the passage must also be considered in the light of the broader message of the entire Bible. How does the passage fit into the narrative of **creation-fall-redemption-restoration**?

**Historical Theology:** It is important to survey how other exegetes and theologians have understood the Bible and theology. Historical theology is generally the study of the development and formation of essential Christian doctrine. It is wise to take a look at how Christians from varying time periods have theologically understood different subjects or topics. Take a little time to review and compare commentaries and other writings on the selected passage of study.

**Systematic Theology:** As we study, it is important to discern how a particular passage fits together systematically within the whole counsel of God's Word. During this process, we typically ask questions to probe how the passage at hand fits into the whole theological picture of the Bible. The general categories of systematic theology are:

- The Doctrine of God's Word (Bibliology)
- The Doctrine of God the Father (Theology Proper)
- The Doctrine of God the Son (Christology)
- The Doctrine of God the Holy Spirit (Pneumatology)
- The Doctrine of Man and Sin (Anthropology/Hamartiology)
- The Doctrine of Salvation (Soteriology)
- The Doctrine of Angels (Angelology)
- The Doctrine of the Church (Ecclesiology)
- The Doctrine of the Future (Eschatology)

**Practical Theology (Life Application):** The Bible is designed to engage each Christian existentially. We should examine how a passage of Scripture applies personally, to the church and to the world. In concluding your critical study of scripture, it is good to answer the following questions: What does this passage say to our present life situation? What meaning does this passage of Scripture have for us today? How is God leading me as I live among believers as well as unbelievers?

# References & Recommended Resources

## HELPFUL RESOURCES:

1. Logos Bible Study Software (<https://www.logos.com/>) - I recommend starting with the Bronze package.
2. Blue Letter Bible (<https://www.blueletterbible.org/>)
3. Bible Gateway (<https://www.biblegateway.com/>)
4. Bible Study Tools (<http://www.biblestudytools.com/>)
5. Best Bible Commentaries (<http://bestcommentaries.com/>)
6. Monergism (<https://www.monergism.com/>)

## REFERENCES:

1. <https://gotquestions.org/Biblical-exegesis.html>
2. <https://gotquestions.org/exegesis-eisegesis.html>
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5. MacArthur, John, and Richard Mayhue. Biblical doctrine: a systematic summary of Bible truth. Wheaton: Crossway, 2017.
6. Wilkin, J. (2014). Women of the word: how to study the Bible with both our hearts and our minds. Wheaton, IL: Crossway.
7. Naselli, Andrew David. How to understand and apply the New Testament: twelve steps from exegesis to theology. Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2017.

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