

Exegetical Process at Ashland Theological Seminary
The Biblical Studies Department
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Introduction

Scripture is one of the core values at Ashland Theological Seminary – arguably the foundational one. We come to Scripture here not merely out of historical interest, but looking for a word from God. With Heinrich Bullinger in his *Second Helvetic Confession*, we expect to encounter the “Word” in, with, and through the “words.” Our orientation to Scripture is essentially incarnational. It is because of this that teaching the art and science of exegesis is a vitally important part of our curriculum.

In order to begin to think about what exegesis is and why it matters, it may be helpful to think of encountering Scripture, the “Word-made-Text,” by way of analogy with encountering Jesus, the Word-made-Flesh. If we really want to see, to listen to, and to know the God-made-man, and thereby to know God and God’s purposes more deeply, we have to be ready to discard many of our presuppositions about this Jesus. He will not look like any of the images we carry around in our minds from art, movies, or our own imaginations. If we don’t let go of these presuppositions, we won’t recognize Jesus when we run into him. He will look like a hard-working Semitic craftsman. His attire, hygiene, table manners, and so forth will be fully in line with those exhibited by residents of first-century Galilee. If we want to understand him as he teaches his fellow Jews in the synagogue or interacts with the centurion and Pilate, we will have to learn Aramaic, Hebrew, and some Greek. We’ll have to observe how other teachers conduct themselves with their students and what forms they use to teach them, so we can know better how Jesus’ students are processing his teaching and example, and so we can begin to discern what’s “special” about *this* teacher. We’ll have to immerse ourselves in the traditions (both biblical and extrabiblical) that Jesus has soaked up over the course of his lifetime, so we can understand precisely what impact he’s trying to have.

Encountering the Word-made-Text will require very similar moves. Exegesis is the process of teasing meaning *out of* a text as opposed to reading meaning *into* the text. It is a disciplined process of discovering our presuppositions about the text and patiently listening to the “otherness” of the text so as to hear its authentic voice. The messages the Scriptures communicate are encoded within foreign languages that took shape within, and drew meaning from, ancient cultures and customs, with their foreign ways of thinking and relating. When we give Scripture a cursory reading without patiently digging into it, taking the time to understand the language and the social, cultural, and historical worlds within which it took shape and that provides its framework for communicating meanings, we are lured into supposing that we “get it”

when, in fact, we are probably reading *in* to Scripture as much if not more than we are reading *out from* the Scripture.

The “meaning” of a literary text can be conceived of in multiple ways. Meaning, first of all, can be discerned in the intent of the author, what the author or authors “meant” to say. On the other hand, meaning can be seen in the impact the text makes on individual readers or reading communities, how readers in various contexts and locations understand how the text speaks to them. Third, a biblical text can be viewed as a record of human experience with God at a particular point or points in time, focusing our attention on the experiences and issues to which it testifies. Finally, the meaning of a text can be ascertained through an examination of its structures, grammar, features and devices. None of these aspects should be neglected in exegesis. Insisting that the biblical text can “mean” only in one of these ways cuts off potential pathways of insight and impact. Keeping all in mind facilitates a fuller, richer engagement with the biblical text that will deepen faith, clarify beliefs, and strengthen mission.

The strategies of exegesis help us enter into the life world that gave rise to the Scriptural text, with which we hear and appreciate its rich resonances, out of which we can hear the text speaking more in its own voice in its own contexts. It doesn’t take long to see that careful exegesis translates to a much richer “seeing and hearing” of the text. What is “heard” then may be lived. And what is lived then may be shared.

The Biblical Studies department at Ashland Theological Seminary is committed to helping you develop these strategies of exegesis. In this document, we lay out an overview of the kinds of tools, methods, and perspectives that inform the larger exegetical process. The institutional core course, “Foundations of Bible Study,” exercises you in some essential practices of making observations about the text that provide the groundwork for, and feed into several particular strategies of, exegesis. In biblical studies core classes (Introduction to the Old Testament I & II; Introduction to the New Testament I & II), you will learn more about the theory and practice of each of the strategies introduced in this document as we keep the larger model in view. The biblical language courses will help you move from exegesis on the basis of English translations to performing exegesis on the text in its original language. If you take “book studies” (“Exegesis of Psalms” or “Exegesis of Matthew,” for example), you will have an even more extensive and integrated experience of this process. Our colleagues in other departments stand alongside us to reinforce the mastery of exegesis, as they build exegetical components into their assignments, bridging the Scriptural foundations with theology and ministry.

It is important to bear in mind from the outset that exegesis is not a strictly linear process, even though the steps outlined in this document could give that impression. No attempt has been made to number these steps, since that would only promote such a false impression. The process is more often a spiral. Exegesis in practice entails a process of revisiting and revising the insights gleaned from the first strategies we have

employed as new insights and information are acquired from later strategies. Moreover, there are multiple starting points. The outline below moves from close investigation of the text to the historical setting and context of the text's original composition and then to the history of how the text has been investigated and interpreted before arriving at application. But one could also start in the historical setting or in the history of interpretation and move from there out into the other areas before arriving at application.

Not all texts require, or even invite, all avenues of exegetical exploration. Part of your growth as an exegete and interpreter of Scripture (and other texts) will be your development of discernment concerning which avenues are appropriate and fruitful for getting at the meanings and challenges of different texts.

Choosing the Passage and Examining Presuppositions

A commentary is the result of performing exegesis on an entire book of the Bible, but in preparation for any sermon or lesson you will only be able to examine a particular selection from one or a number of scriptural texts. Because selecting a passage means conscious choice, it is appropriate to reflect on that choice critically.¹

What are the boundaries of the passage you are looking at? How do you establish whether the passage is a self-contained unit, with a demonstrable beginning and end? How does it demonstrate coherence of thought? Is the passage manageable for the level of exegetical experience you have developed thus far?

Why did you choose this passage? What presuppositions do you bring to the text (theological, cultural, etc.) from your own social, cultural, and theological location? What issues interest you? What is the goal of interrogating this text? Is the text relevant for that goal?

Gathering Resources for In-depth Exegesis

Exegesis requires observation and critical reflection on the biblical text and one's own interpretive context. Direct, firsthand work with the text lies at the center of exegesis. Standard reference materials (e.g., concordances, lexicons, dictionaries) can provide essential information about the historical background and the meanings of words, for

¹ This is true even if you preach using a lectionary. It is important to understand the rationale for the limits set on a passage in the lectionary, and sometimes to challenge those limits in the course of a sermon. The Revised Common Lectionary also provides the preacher with four choices each Sunday: a reading from the Old Testament, from the Psalms, from the Gospels, and from the Epistles. Thinking about what draws you more to one lection than the others is useful for becoming more aware of your own interests and presuppositions as you start the exegetical process.

example, that aid one's own firsthand work with a text, or serve as tools that facilitate the same.

Other sources, such as articles, commentaries, and monographs (in-depth scholarly investigations of particular questions), fill in important gaps in our knowledge and offer important perspectives on the text. Some information in commentaries supports our first-hand work with a text, such as suggesting earlier Jewish, Greco-Roman, or Ancient Near Eastern texts with which our text may be interacting in some way. We would be hard pressed to find these potential sources of intertexture (see below) on our own, and so we rely on the data gathered in commentaries and articles to help us conduct our own first-hand study of the text.

Of course, the exegetical decisions made in commentaries and by other specialists are of great value to our own study of the text – but these are often best engaged after we have explored the text as fully as possible on our own (see below under “Engaging the Larger Conversations About the Passage”). Other scholarly conclusions, however, should not substitute for the student's own work or voice: the student's first-hand analysis is tested and examined by bringing it into conversation with the work of other scholars.

Establishing and Translating the Text

We do not possess the original manuscripts which the Psalmist, or Paul, or James actually wrote. We have, instead, copies of copies of copies (and so on) of those originals. The wording in one manuscript often varies from the wording in the next, with the result that no two are exactly alike. The discipline of textual criticism involves comparing the readings of these various manuscripts in an effort to determine the most likely original reading. Establishing the text is often taken as a starting point for examining the passage in detail. Obviously, this requires some knowledge of Greek or Hebrew.

Are there any significant variations in wording in the early manuscripts? What might these variants say about issues, difficulties, or questions in the early reception of the passage? Useful tools include the critical notes located at the bottom of the page (the “textual apparatus”) in the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament and the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*; Bruce Metzger, *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (United Bible Societies, 1971; rev. ed., 1994); P. W. Comfort, *New Testament Text and Translation Commentary* (Tyndale, 2008); Emmanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Old Testament* (2nd ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001).

Read the passage in multiple translations (NRSV, NKJV, NIV, ESV, JB, TNK, TNIV, RSV, etc.). If possible, translate the passage from the original language yourself and compare your translation with these multiple translations. Note places where different senses are given to words or where different grammatical relationships are established between words or clauses and whether words are omitted or inserted. How

do you explain and adjudicate between these different translations? These observations can generate important questions for you as you continue to study the passage.

Inner-textual Analysis (including IT502 strategies)

Exegesis calls for thinking systematically about what the passage actually says, which involves us in the close study of the meanings of the words in the text, the grammatical relationships between words in the text (e.g., the subject of a particular verb, etc.), the emphases and movement that are present in the text, and so forth.

What does the passage say? How does analysis of particular words and study of the original Hebrew or Aramaic or Greek text inform your own reading of the text? Are there any terms that could be considered technical (e.g. Son of Man) or unusual (e.g. *hapax legomena*, terms that only occur once in the Old or New Testament) or idiomatic? How do the words, clauses, and paragraphs work, individually and together, to convey meaning?

How would you map the flow, the development of thought, in the passage? Is there a main idea? If so, what is the main idea of each paragraph in your text? Does each paragraph logically connect with the others? If the passage is a narrative text or story, how would you map its plot and development? What narrative progression in character, plot, setting, etc., can you observe?

What is the structure of the passage? Are there symmetries or patterns of thought, theme, or structure? If so, what associations do they elicit? How would you outline this text to depict this structure?

What images or mental pictures might be evoked for the hearers? What areas of social or cultural experience (e.g., household structures, patron/client or slave/master relationships, rituals) do these images invoke, and how might the logic or “rules” of that arena of experience be subtly brought to bear in the text? Does the text employ symbolism or metaphors? If so, what is the import of those metaphors and blends of images in the text?

Literary Context

You have often heard people object that something they said or did, was “taken out of context.” The larger conversation that surrounds a single utterance, or the larger matrix of events and circumstances that surround a single act, provides a very important interpretive frame or context. For this reason, looking at your passage within its literary context – both the immediate context, which is the paragraphs that precede and follow, and the larger context of the whole book – is an essential exegetical strategy.

How does the unit you are exploring connect to its immediate literary context and how does it fit within its larger literary context? What does the preceding material contribute to its understanding, and how does the passage advance the flow/progression of the following sections of the book? How does this passage fit into

overall the literary context of the chapter, section (e.g., the Holiness Code, the Sermon on the Mount/Plain, the Johannine Farewell Discourse, etc.) and book? What is the function of the passage within the book?

What themes are present within the passage, and how do these relate to themes in the surrounding material? Are there resonances in vocabulary, characters, topic, or plot with other passages in this book? How does that affect your sense of what your passage says, and what it contributes to the larger whole?

What can be learned from other texts written by the same author (or the emerging literary tradition) that might have an impact on an interpretation of the text? For example, how might the larger Deuteronomistic History (Joshua through 2 Kings) inform your study of 1 Kings 3, or how does the whole of Luke-Acts illumine your exegesis of Luke 4, or how would the larger content of Paul's letters impact your study of Galatians 2?

Literary History and Composition

Some texts have an editorial and compositional history. Some were written and compiled in stages, and later revised to speak to a new setting. Untangling that history can often help us hear the text better, since we can hear it speak at various stages of composition to different historical/pastoral contexts. Some books have a literary relationship with other texts, sometimes using them as sources (like Matthew and Luke may have used Mark, or 2 Peter may have used Jude), sometimes presenting, in effect, alternative accounts of the same events (like the Gospels, or 1&2 Chronicles alongside 1&2 Samuel + 1&2 Kings). Looking closely at such relationships often helps us to discover more about the particular questions raised, and contributions made, in the different texts.

Check "synoptic parallels" (the term applies to Mt, Mk, Lk; 1-2 Sam, 1-2 Kgs, and 1+2 Chron; other "doublets," e.g., in the legal material) where they exist. What differences in material, language, presentation, or literary order do you detect? Do these differences signal particular interests or emphases on the part of the author whose text you are studying? How do the differences contribute to creating meaning?

Are there incongruities, doublets, or other indications that the passage has a complex history of composition? How have biblical scholars addressed the composition of the text? How might a composite text bear the traces of theological reflection over time? How do the voices of authors and redactors contribute to the theological richness of the passage? Why have tensions in the text been allowed to stand? Might the above features be indications of intentional literary artistry rather than multiple redactions or revisions? If so, what do they convey?

Analysis of Form and Genre

“Genre” and “form” are terms used to talk about the category of literature into which the passage we are studying (and the larger book of which it is a part) falls. A “genre” is a conventional type of human communication that can be identified by particular, recognizable elements. In biblical study, it may refer to classes of literature (e.g. lament, gospel, apocalyptic) or compact literary units (e.g. vision report, judgment oracle, miracle story). A genre draws from a basic “form” that comprises a fixed, simple structure, and often common vocabulary or formulaic language. Observations about form often lead to conclusions about the genre of the text.

There are often sets of expectations connected with a particular form or genre, and these expectations enter into how an author and audience will have thought about and experienced the text. In our own experience, we negotiate “genre” and the appropriate set of expectations related to genre throughout the day. We hear a “commercial” and we have a set of expectations for what the subject matter will be (discussion of some product), the purpose of the communication (selling the product), the degree of literalism or reliability we should ascribe to the claims made about the product (they are trying to *sell* it, after all, not provide a balanced view of the product alongside others on the market). A friend starts speaking, and certain formal features at the outset will usually clue us in as to whether she is sharing a personal story (“My aunt was diagnosed with cancer”) or a joke (“Two guys went into a hospital”), and our automatic discernment of genre gives us important information about how to process and respond to the story our friend tells. Getting the genre wrong can seriously skew our understanding of what is being said!

What is the genre and/or the literary form of the passage? What are the ancient conventions (literary, rhetorical, etc) of this type of literature? How are these conventions evident in the text you are studying? How does the author utilize, transform, or subvert conventions to communicate his/her point, and to what ends (for example, once we’ve identified the genre of Galatians as a letter, we might ask why it does not have a “Thanksgiving” like other Pauline letters)? How does the form or genre suggest what kinds of questions and observations are appropriate in regard to this text?

Historical/Pastoral Context (Rhetorical Situation)

A passage from Scripture does not only have a literary context, or a generic context (the larger context of the expectations and “rules” of a particular kind of literature). It will also have an historical context. Very likely, the text was written out of a pastoral concern within a specific historical context – something that has made these texts resonate with generation after generation of Jewish and Christian leaders seeking from them a word from the Lord to address the pastoral concerns in their own historical

contexts. Exploring the historical context, and the more specific concerns or exigencies that the text might address within that context, is an essential component of exegesis.

What do we know about the people involved in the construction of the text (authors, editors, scribes, community)? What presuppositions and motives might have influenced the presentation of ideas? What do we know or surmise about the intended (or implied/inscribed in or by the text) audience and their circumstances? What can we not know for sure about the text and its background?

What is the historical, social, religious, and geographical location of the people involved in the production of the text, and how does this demonstrably impact the author's thinking and writing? What resources (e.g., ancient documents, dictionaries, histories, archaeology) help us to flesh out this location more fully?

What social, economic, religious, ethical, or political circumstances, problems, or issues does the author seem intent on addressing or responding to in the book as a whole and in your passage in particular? How is the author trying to shape the hearers' responses to those issues? What rhetorical constraints does the passage bring to bear on the situation so as to increase the probability of securing these outcomes? What rhetorical conventions does the author employ? What lenses does the author hold up to the issue? How does he or she re-picture or re-imagine reality? Construct arguments? With what topics? How does the author "frame" or interpret the situation and possible responses, so as to direct the addressees to respond in a particular way?

How might the audience have understood the text? What were the potential meanings for the original audience? What historical, social and cultural factors might have influenced the audience's reception of this passage? Is there potential for misunderstanding? Is the passage prescriptive or descriptive? How does the answer affect how we understand and apply the text?

Intertexture (Literary Conversations)

The writers of the texts that would come to be included in the Scriptures were often themselves reading, interpreting, and interacting with other texts that had been or would be included in the Scriptures, and often with texts that lie beyond our canon of Scripture. This is the context of the larger conversations of which the particular passage you are studying was a part. The Psalmists, authors of Proverbs, and the prophets were reading at least substantial portions of the Torah (teachings, laws and instructions contained in first five books of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible). Jesus, Paul, and other early Christians were reading and interpreting the Jewish Scriptures and other writings (like Ben Sira and Tobit), including "pagan" poets. Matthew and Luke were reading Mark. The author of 2 Peter was reading Paul and Jude (who had even been reading *1 Enoch!*). Entering into the ways the author of the passage you are studying read, interpreted, and applied other texts will often play an important role in interpreting that passage.

Does the author draw on material from previous books, perhaps quoting, recontextualizing (placing them in a new context that differs from the original context), alluding to, or echoing texts from the Hebrew Bible or Septuagint (the early Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures used by Greek-speaking Jews), literature outside of the biblical canon, or other early Christian writers? How does the author read and interpret the other text? Does the author modify the resource? Does the author read the text in ways consonant with its original meaning in its context, or in surprisingly different ways? How do you account for his use of the text? To what purpose does the author employ this intertexture?

Is the text itself used as a resource by later authors and how can we detect such use? How is it read (and perhaps modified) by later writers?

Comparative Literature

The cultures of the Ancient Near East and the Greco-Roman world produced abundant literary artifacts. These help us enter into that world more fully to learn about the cultural, philosophical, theological, social, political, and ideological backgrounds pertinent to the authors and audiences of the Scriptural texts of concern to us. Paying attention to this literature can also help us to learn about the conversations that were being carried on “out there,” and to discover where our authors reinforce what others are saying, where they go beyond it, and where they challenge the “wisdom” of the age.

Are there any texts that provide literary parallels to, or comparative texts for, your passage elsewhere in biblical and extra-biblical literature (for example, the story of Gilgamesh as a comparative text for the Noah story, or the Wisdom of Amenemope for Proverbs 22-24)? What does comparative literature tell us about the audience’s possible expectations (e.g., attitudes about Samaritans in Second Temple Period Judaism, or ideas about the roles and responsibilities of members of the household in Greek and Jewish sources, or ideas about the gods and grace)? How does the biblical author reinforce expectations? How does the author surprise the reader?

What ideologies of gender, social class, ethnicity, or power are encoded within or critiqued by the passage, in both the content and the rendering of the passage?

Engaging the Larger Conversations About the Passage

The Scriptures have stood at the heart of Jewish and Christian conversation for millennia. Scholars, pastors, priests, and rabbis have devoted lifetimes to learning, reading, and reflecting on these texts. While we stress the importance of your own first-hand digging into the Scriptures and listening for its voice, the process of exegesis includes inviting differing and/or various voices into conversation with us about the text. The mystery of the people of God as “Body” includes the premise that we see and understand the text more fully when we talk about it together.

Who are and have been the key figures commenting on this text, and how have they shaped the conversation about the text? What have scholars from a variety of locations contributed to our understanding (or *mis*understanding!) of this text, and how have they interpreted it? What do these scholars contribute to answering the questions you have brought to the text, arising out of any of the exegetical strategies outlined above? What new questions do they bring?

How have different persons of various backgrounds – including Christians of different perspectives, experiences, and contexts – read and appropriated the text? How do their readings help you identify what you may have missed in your own analysis? This is an essential facet of exegesis irrespective of one’s starting point and hermeneutical lens, since it helps us to hear the text beyond the limitations of the mindset and scripts of our own social location, whatever that social location may be.

If we want to hear the Spirit’s voice, we need to listen to the church in all its breadth, across the globe, across ethnic and gender lines, across national lines of “us” and “them,” across denominational lines. Only in this way can we more fully discern “what the Spirit says to the churches.” Exegesis takes place in community, between different communities, so that we may hear what comes out of the text more fully than what we hear of its meaning from within our own location with its blind spots. No reader or hearer sees all angles from his or her own corner. And each act of exegesis, whether on the same or a different text, can yield new and fresh insights.

Reflecting on Our Hermeneutical Lenses

Every reader approaches a text with an interpretive framework, a perspective or “lens” through which he or she attempts to understand and draw meaning from a text. In other words, consciously or unconsciously, an exegete employs an overarching paradigm or paradigms governing his or her analysis of the text. Part of the task of critical exegesis involves becoming more fully conscious of the lenses and paradigms we employ as we interpret biblical texts. Personal experience, religious indoctrination, or academic training, among other things, predispose an interpreter’s selection of certain texts and not others, naming of potential meanings in the text, and the choice of what tools to use in the interpretative process.

If our interest lies in trying to discover an original or historical meaning of a text, we may employ primarily a historical-critical lens. Feminist and womanist scholars approach the study or interpretation of texts with a lens that privileges an understanding that women are fully human, women’s experiences are central, and that some texts must be approached with a critical eye toward androcentric, patriarchal, and other biases. Postcolonial interpreters are interested in the relationship between dominant and subordinated groups within the text, as well as in the history of the interpretation and application of the text (not that Feminist and other scholars are not interested in history of interpretation and application). It is often most helpful

consciously to adopt and integrate several different lenses. The adoption of several lenses can open up faithful readings of the text that allow for insights into and critique of power arrangements in texts and in our contemporary locations that we would otherwise ignore.

Revisiting Assumptions and Presuppositions

Revisit your responses to the second part of “choosing the passage.” Have other presuppositions, conventions, and perspectives of your own or your faith community been uncovered in the process of studying the text? Where does the text or the conversation about the text challenge your presuppositions about it? How does the passage offer a vision of who God is, what God is doing in the world, and the shape of faithful discipleship? At what points does this vision chafe against your own vision? How does this text offer an expanded or challenging vision to you and your community?

Summarizing the Message

After you have worked through the strategies appropriate to your passage and reworked through them all again in light of what the unfolding process brought forward, it is important to put it all together, perhaps focusing on a statement about what the text’s authors and/or editors were trying to say and to accomplish. What was their “word” and how was it crafted to address specific challenges and questions facing the community of faith then? This becomes a useful launching pad for considering how the text speaks to and challenges us. Often this will require consideration of the passage’s “word” within the larger conversation of the church’s canon on that subject.

What possible theological, ethical, social, and political claims were being made by this text in its original setting? How do these claims converse with others within the book, within similar books, and with the whole canon of scripture? Is the text in tension with another text (see Rom 13 and Rev 13)? How do we resolve the question of how/whether/when to honor both texts?

Discerning and Communicating the Word to New Situations

Understanding the passage as a word crafted to address its pastoral and historical setting gives us a solid, fixed point in interpretation, but, in many ways, the difficult work begins as we try to move from that point to our own location, working to discern how that word can speak faithfully, and speak “on target,” to people in a very different social and cultural location. The task requires apt interpretation of our own context on top of all the work spent understanding the text in *its* context, and even sometimes calls us to raise questions about whether a text still speaks to the new context.

What does the text show us about who God is, about who we are as humans, about the divine/human relationship and about our relationship to other groups and

agendas in the world around us? How does it not only impact what one believes, but also how one lives? How does the text inspire you and challenge you? Where does the text make you uncomfortable?

What parallels exist between our society and the ancient world? How does the Scriptural author's diagnosis of his hearers' situation raise questions for us about diagnosing issues in ours? Where are the stakes similar? How do the resources that the author brings to bear on his hearers' situation continue to cast valuable interpretive light on analogous situations in our contexts? What would the personal- and social-formation outcomes sought by the author "look like" in our setting, and under what circumstances would these outcomes still be appropriate?

What issues have changed? What is the social distance between us and the original text? How can that social distance be bridged in a way that honors the text and its world? Are there any elements that might be considered culturally or chronologically time bound?

What are the questionable or sensitive issues in the application of the passage, particularly as voices from social locations different from our own are able to raise these to consciousness. Feminist critiques and constructive applications? Postcolonial critiques and constructive possibilities? Perspectives from multiple Christian denominational locations? Social Justice critiques from our communities and the world at large? What do we need to see more clearly about ourselves and our practices before we can apply this passage fully to ourselves and ourselves fully to it? What does the text say to the concerns of multiple contemporary social locations?

How can we translate – or critique and reject – elements offensive to our understanding of God's vision for human community in our changed social and cultural locations (such as genocide in Joshua, slavery in the NT household codes in the NT, patriarchal presuppositions)?

How can we hear elements that would be shocking to the original hearers (e.g., the idea of a "good" Samaritan, the behavior of the prodigal Son, the divine command for human sacrifice in the story of Abraham and Isaac), but have become ordinary for us?

How does this application differ depending on one's personal and social location? How might this application suggest applications for the wider community which might have been overlooked?

How do I convey the message and challenge of this text in a way that is faithful to its form and content (e.g. when is it appropriate to preach a narrative text narratologically rather than propositionally, or a discursive text by means of a more narrational sermon)?

Summary

Recalling that one can begin exegesis from multiple starting points, and that exegesis is not a linear process, but rather one in which each new phase of analysis sharpens our insight into earlier analyses, the following may serve as a handy summary of the exegetical process.

1. Select a reasonably delimited passage.
2. Examine your presuppositions, interests, and commitments regarding the text as you begin study.
3. Gather your tools for in-depth study, both general (e.g., concordances and lexica) and specific (commentaries, journal articles, books about your chosen text).
4. Establish the text and examine important variants.
5. Translate the text, compare English translations, and identify lexical and grammatical issues for further investigation.
6. Examine the inner-texture of the passage: study the meanings of significant Hebrew or Greek words; map the narrative or logical progression; map the structure of the passage.
7. Examine the passage in its literary context (immediate and broader contexts).
8. Examine, if applicable, the signs of literary pre-history and editing (redaction) in the text.
9. Examine the form of the passage, the implications of the same for determining its genre and purpose, and any signs of subversion of conventions.
10. Study the historical context and rhetorical situation of the passage, insofar as this can be recovered. What challenges or questions evoke this text, and what does the author seek to accomplish by writing?
11. Explore the intertexture of the passage.
12. Study the passage in light of well-chosen comparative literature.
13. Read and evaluate what other scholars have learned about the text and how they arrived at those conclusions; expand and refine your own work accordingly. Make every effort to read the work of people from a variety of social and global locations.
14. Re-examine your assumptions and presuppositions, noting where these have been confirmed or challenged.
15. Revisit the hermeneutical lenses you have used or encountered in the course of exegesis; it is best to combine a variety of author-centered, text-centered, and reader-centered approaches.
16. Summarize the message of the text.
17. Perform exegesis on your faith community and its context; discern how your passage would address this new rhetorical situation; formulate an effective way to deliver that word.

Resources for Exegetical Methodology

General/Comprehensive Resources on Exegetical Method

- Anderson, Janice Capel, and Stephen Moore, eds. *Mark and Method*. 2nd ed. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008.
- Barton, John. *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Bible Study*. Rev. ed. Louisville: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 1997.
- Black, David Alan, and David S. Dockery, eds. *Interpreting the New Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2001.
- deSilva, David A. *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods & Ministry Formation*. InterVarsity, 2004.
- Erickson, Richard. *A Beginner's Guide to New Testament Exegesis*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005.
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