

An Exegetical Method

(Adapted from Gordon Fee- New Testament Exegesis)

[Prayer and Spiritual preparation]

[Determine the Text to be studied]

I. Survey the general historical context

A. Purpose:

To learn where the text comes from, why it was written and what the author is aiming at.

B. Manner:

1. Read the document through in one sitting as an overview
2. Read it again in more detail noting relevant data
3. Make a general outline of the document

II. Confirm the limits of the passage

A. Purpose:

To determine which part of the whole is a self-contained unit of thought to be studied.

B. Manner:

1. Compare where a number of English translations break the paragraph or section.
2. Make a final determination based on key words, conjunctions or shift of topic.
3. If the section is too large, further divide the section, If it is too small, combine two sections

III. TOQ (Translation/Translation survey, Observation, Questions)

A. Purpose:

To survey the passage. To carefully observe and list things which need special attention.

B. Manner:

1. Make a provisional translation OR read the passage in several different translations
2. Make a list of places where translations have significant differences
3. List your observations of significant items from the passage
4. List any questions that you have about the passage, noting any ambiguities and difficulties.

IV. Analyze Sentence Structure/Flow of Thought-

A. Purpose:

To see the logical relationships between the words, sentences, and ideas, and their meaning.

B. Manner:

1. For Discourse- Make a sentence flow and arc of the passage
2. For Narrative- Make a storyboard of the passage
3. For Poetry- analyze the parallelism and make an arc of the passage
4. Restate the argument and major points of your passage in your own words.

V. Analyze the Grammar and significant words

A. Purpose:

To see the meaning of the individual words, ideas and language relationships.

B. Manner:

1. Determine and list any significant grammatical relationships and functions.
2. Determine which words bear the need for further study
3. Look up these words in Lexicons, Bible Dictionaries and Encyclopedias, and Theological Dictionaries to find the range of meanings
4. Determine the precise meaning by the word's use in context

VI. Research the specific historical/cultural background

A. Purpose:

To understand those things which are unknown/unclear because of historical distance

B. Manner:

1. Determine if your passage is primarily Jewish and/or Greco-Roman
2. Look up key words, places, persons, events, institutions and/or concepts in Background studies and Background commentaries

VII. [Specific steps for different genres]

A. Purpose:

To use the normal conventions of the type of writing to see the meaning via the genre clues.

B. Manner:

Varies – depending on the genre

VIII. Go back and check/revise your sentence structure/flow of thought based on grammar/word/background studies

A. Purpose:

To let the research correct and challenge your blind spots, preconceptions and mistakes.

B. Manner:

1. Work with erasable media.
2. Purposely review your work and revise as necessary
3. Be honest about the strength of your evidence and conclusions

IX. Consider the broader Biblical/Theological contexts

A. Purpose:

To see how your passage fits with the entirety of the Biblical revelation. To allow Scripture to interpret Scripture.

B. Manner:

1. Determine how the meaning of your passage compares to and contrasts with other biblical material that deals with the same or similar issues
2. Check cross references in Study Bibles or Topical lists
3. Check Indexes in Biblical and Systematic Theologies

X. Research the secondary literature

A. Purpose:

To interact with the wider community of scholarship both as a safety check and guide into more insight

B. Manner:

1. Compare your finding with commentaries
2. Check for journal articles using the Periodical Index, New Testament Abstracts or Old Testament Abstracts
3. Assess, compare and weigh different arguments and new evidence
4. Adjust your findings to take your new knowledge into account.

[Hermeneutical/Theological and Application steps]