

NT 615 EXEGETICAL PROCESS NOTEBOOK¹

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PASSAGE: 1Thessalonians

Instructions: Use this template for your research. Answer the questions thoroughly and give your reasons from the Scripture passages you are investigating. Include scriptural references for easy referral later when you begin to write your projects. There are no page limits for any of the steps. This “Exegetical Process Notebook” is the work product that you will use for your final project at the end of this course.

STEP 1. SURVEY THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT IN GENERAL

1.1 Read the entire document in English in one sitting: YES x NO

1.1.1 AUTHOR. Paul the apostle

- a) What **do you observe** about the identity of the author and his circumstances from your reading of the biblical book you are investigating?

The apostle Paul after spending a few months in the city of Thessalonica where he had established a church was forced to leave the city. Paul was worried about the young believers and what had happened to them in the midst of the persecution which they were experiencing. Paul was concerned whether these young believers were able to withstand the trials. Paul sent Timothy who returned with the good news of the steadfastness of the believers. Despite persecution, the Thessalonians were examples to believers everywhere. They thought about Paul, who encouraged them to rejoice in the Lord and to give thanks in everything for God who has called them, is faithful.

- b) What more do you learn about the life of the author and his situation at the time of writing from the **secondary literature** (New Testament and Old Testament Introductions, Critical Commentaries, Critical Bible Dictionaries, etc.)?

On reading “The Letters to the Thessalonians” by Abraham J. Malherbe and The Message to 1&2 Thessalonians by John R.W. Stott, I learned that Paul travelled to Thessalonica from Philippi. When he arrived in Thessalonica it was already a city with a long history. Thessalonica had a large Jewish population, Paul preached there for three consecutive Sabbaths, at a synagogue that they had established.

According to Acts 21:39, 22:3, Paul was born and lived a Jew at Tarsus. He was loyal to the ancestral faith which remained a mark of pride for him. Paul according to Acts 22:3 was educated in Jerusalem “at the feet of Gamaliel,” his teacher, noted for his spirit of tolerance. Paul was a member of the Pharisaic Party (Phil 3:5). He learned a trade of tent making and other leather work (Acts 18:3) probably from his father; practice of this trade provided Paul with the means to support his missionary activities (1Thes 2:19, 1Cor. 9:6). Prior to his conversion, Paul persecuted the Christians, Acts reported that he “made

havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison” (Acts 8:3). Paul looked forward to the coming of the messiah. He had heard the message of the disciples and he had been impressed by their perseverance. Paul’s conversion did not involve turning to a new God (1Thes. 1:9), before or after his conversion, Paul worshipped the God of the Old Testament. Paul’s conversion involved two main elements: the revelation of the Son of God, and the commission to preach Christ to the Gentiles. He was engaged in missionary work in north Galatia establishing churches in Galatia, Philippi and Thessalonica (1Thes. 1:2-3:10). Paul devoted the balance of his life to the fulfillment of God’s commission.

1.1.2. **RECIPIENTS:**

*Base your answers on what you see in the text itself. You should make educated guesses about the answers to these questions from your observations. Only **after you do your work** should you consult secondary literature.*

a) What do **you observe** about the identity of the recipients?

The recipients were the young believers of the church of Thessalonica 1Thes. 1:1.

b) What is the relationship between the author and the recipients?

The relationship between Paul and the Thessalonians was that of a father and his children, and also, as a gentle nurse who with tender care cherishes her children.

c) Where do the recipients live?

The recipients live in the city of Thessalonica.

d) What are their present circumstances?

The Thessalonians are experiencing persecution, and they are concerned about believers who have passed away before the Lord’s return.

e) What historical situation occasioned this writing?

1.1.3 **PURPOSE:**

a) What is the author’s purpose for writing (explicit and implied)?

Paul’s purpose for writing was to encourage and strengthen the believers in the faith, and to remind them to live in anticipation of the Lord’s return.

b) . What is the overall theme or concern?

The overall theme is the return of the Lord.

c) Does the argument or narrative have an easily discerned outline or storyline?

I believe the narrative has an easily discerned outline.

***You want to acquire a working knowledge of the following before writing your papers or doing your projects. You will need to add the research found in commentaries, dictionaries, etc.:**

- Who was the author, and what was his background? (If there are different views, which is the stronger position and why?)
- When did he write, and what was happening at the time the book was written? (Often there are different views. Consider all the different views and ask yourself, how does my answer affect the interpretation?)
- What was the nature of his ministry?
- Who was the biblical audience who heard this text, and what were their circumstances?
- What kind of relationship did the author have with the audience?
- Why was he writing?
- What kind of relationship did the biblical audience have with God? With each other?
- Are there any other historical-cultural factors that might shed light on the book?

STEP 2. CONFIRM THE LIMITS OF YOUR PASSAGE.

2.1. Decide where your self-contained passage begins and ends. Compare the paragraphing of seven modern translations (e.g., NRSV, NIV, NET, ASV, NASB, NKJV, etc. See Duvall and Hayes, *Grasping God's Word*, p. 17).

- a) Where do the translations differ?
- b) Decide for yourself what the basic unit is. Provide clear reasons based on your observations. *The final decision will be part of the whole exegetical process.*
- c) **"I intend to focus on the following passage from Jonah OR 1 Thessalonians: 1Thessalonians 5:1-11_."**

STEP 3. BECOME THOROUGHLY ACQUAINTED WITH YOUR PARAGRAPH.

3.1. Read the paragraph through in 5-7 translations (at least 2 from the more formal side of the spectrum, 2 from the middle, and 1 from the more functional side of the spectrum, see chart on p. 12).

- a) Copy these translations and mark well the differences among these translations (I like using colored highlighters).
- b) I have read copied, read and mark the translations on the NKJV, NIV, ESV, NASB, NRSV, HCSB, NTE
- c) Make a list (or chart) of the differences.

A chart is completed of the differences.

3.2 Determine which of these differences are exegetically significant (i.e., how do these differences affect the meaning?).

a) Are the differences a matter of the translators using different words (synonyms)?
Yes, the differences are the result of translators using synonyms to express the same idea.

b) Are the differences a matter of grammar?
No, the differences are not a matter of grammar.

c) Are the differences stylistic or reflect a theological preference?
Yes, the differences are stylistic based in the time it was written.

d) Are the differences due to variations in the manuscript evidence (i.e., textual criticism)?
Yes, the differences are due to variations in the manuscripts.

STEP 4: OVERVIEW OF LITERARY CONTEXT

4.1 Describe the literary character of the document (i.e., identify what kind of literature your passage reflects such as narrative [extended story form], a psalm, law, prophecy, epistle, or apocalypse). Remember, some biblical literature contains mixed forms such as the Book of Revelation, which consists of letters, prophecy, extended narrative, and hymns.

If you choose to investigate an **epistle**, determine to what extent it is *ad hoc*, formal, causal, or more like a treatise than a letter, etc. (see Duvall and Hayes, chap. 14, "New Testament Letter," pp. 257-277).

If you choose to investigate a **narrative**, determine if your self-contained paragraph is mainly descriptive, a parable, a prophetic or poetic utterance, etc. Does it employ metaphor, overstatement, irony, etc.? (See Duvall and Hayes, chap. 18, "Old Testament Narrative," pp. 355-378).

4.2 All literary works have a structure in the mind of the human author. Biblical writers have a purpose in writing that guides their choices, whether to write a letter or produce a narrative or even the very words they use. Cast the interpretive net widely before looking at the individual pieces that make up the message.

- ✓ Give an original, detailed outline of the whole book and note the placement of your text within the outline.

4.3 Start to make informed observations. Remember, you are not referring to commentaries right now, otherwise, you will become commentary-dependent and not able to bring in fresh insight. You do not want to simply recycle other people's ideas!

- ✓ **(Epistle)** To what formal aspect of a letter does your text belong (i.e., *introduction*--includes the greeting and thanksgiving paragraph--*body*, or *conclusion*)? How does knowing where your passage fits within the formal structure affect your exegesis, or perhaps it does not from your perspective? How is your passage related to what just went immediately ahead and how does it prepare for what follows? *Be careful of over exegeting and making the section say more than it does. You simply want to gain a perspective of the whole first before working out the details.*
- ✓ **(Narrative)** Where does your passage fit into the overall structure of the book? What is the point of the narrative or speech? How is it related to what just went immediately ahead and how does it prepare for what follows? Are there any peculiarities in the narrative or speech? *Be careful of over exegeting and making the section say more than it does. You simply want to gain a perspective of the whole first before working out the details.*

STEP 5: DETAILED LITERARY ANALYSIS, STRUCTURE and SYNTAX, ARGUMENT, LANGUAGE FEATURES, GRAMMAR, AND WORD STUDY.

5.1 STRUCTURE, SYNTAX, AND LOGIC OF ARGUMENT.

5.1.1. Analyze the structure of your paragraph by starting with a close reading of sentences (cf. Duvall and Hayes, chap. 4, pp. 37-51.). Try using a “sentence flow” method to help clarify the flow of the human author’s argument or story.

Simple “sentence-flow” method:

- 1) **Look at your passage as comprised of sentences that are made up of a series of phrases (chunks) designed to make sense.** For non-English speakers, this step can be challenging. I suggest you work in both your birth language and English translation. See if awareness of the chunks that comprise your sentences makes sense to you.

I saw (gives me subject and action)

a cat (gives me the object of what was seen by me)

under my bed (tells me where I saw the cat)

This method will help reveal the structure of the sentence and will suggest good questions for you to try and answer. Do NOT worry if you are doing it right. The point is to begin observing the relationship among the phrases (how they fit together and build on one another). Do NOT become preoccupied with the minutiae of this method. Just start doing this in a way that makes sense to you!

- 2) Now focus on making connections by **playing around with the text**. Use colored highlighters, circles, asterisks, etc. to note the relationships and special features: repeated words or concepts, syntactical relationships (how the words relate to one another as to cause and effect, contrasts, comparison, figures of speech, and organizing structures like lists. See Duvall and Hayes, p. 51 review.)

Example:

For God → the one doing the action, “for” connects with the previous verse to explain why God wasn’t condemning the world right now

So loved → Why “so loved” and not just loved?

The world → the whole world as it is now?

That He gave → He = God, “loved” and “gave” (past act with ongoing results). 2 actions brought together.

His only begotten son → What does “only begotten” mean?

So that → expresses purpose or result? Gives reason.

Whoever **believes in Him** → whoever = anyone

Believes = present ongoing action

“in Him = Son” → object of belief, cannot believe in just anything or anyone

Should **not perish**

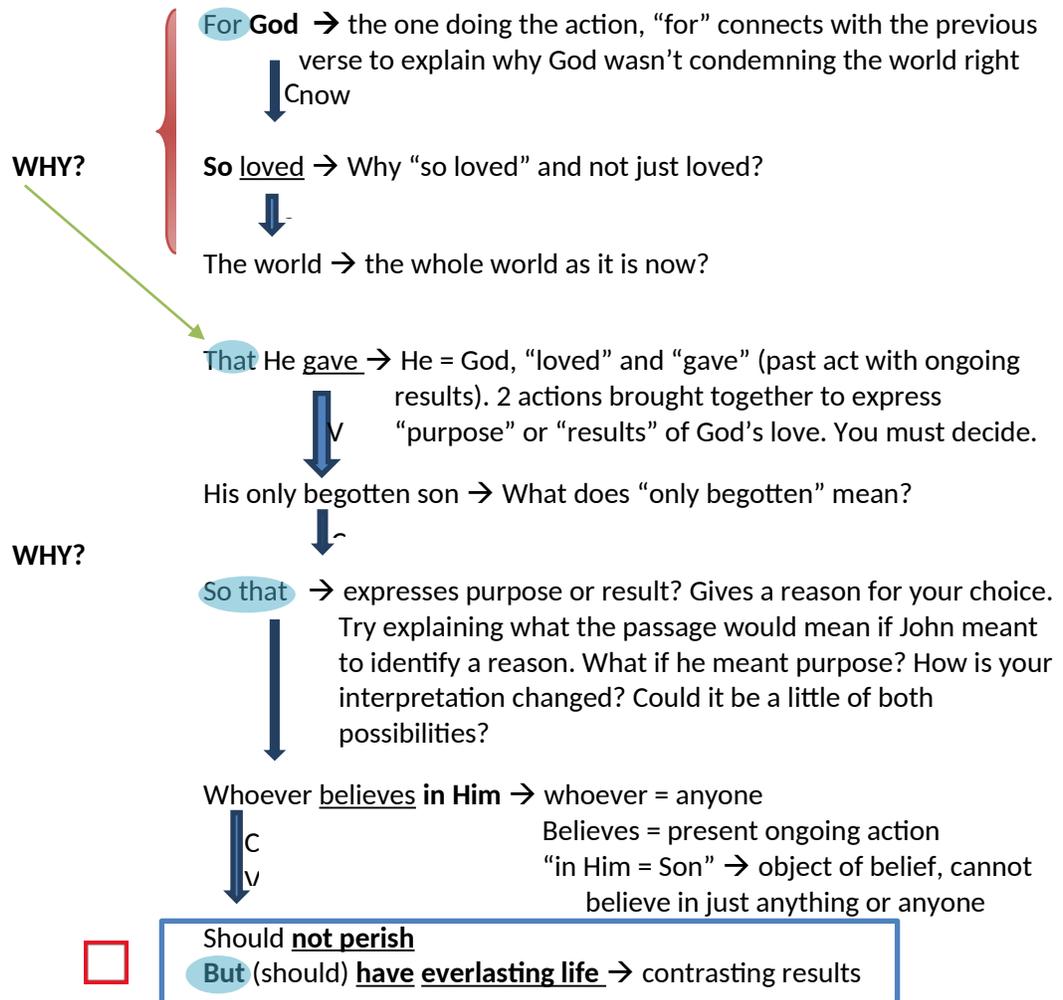
But (should) **have everlasting life** → contrasting results

- 3) Use arrows to note the flow of the argument to the main idea. Use an asterisk to identify what you think is the main idea.

Example:

Previous verse John 3:15. Your job is to observe the interconnections.





MAIN IDEA (?)

5.1.2 Write a summary of the information you can derive from your structure above. What words, relationships, or other structural indicators are important and why? (See Duvall and Hayes, chap. 4 “How to Read a Paragraph,” pp. 57-80 for further help).

5.1.3 Set out briefly the logic and content of your text (how does the author weigh each step in his argument, etc.) and show the significance of your paragraph in the overall argument/ exhortation/story, etc.? (See Duvall and Hayes, chap. 5, “How to Read the Book—Discourses,” pp. 81-106).

*For OT narratives, analyze your passage within the narrative context (who are the main characters, what are they doing now, how do you know what you know about them,

what is being said, what is the role of the narrator, etc.). Are there any persons, places, or names that need further investigation in a Bible dictionary? (See Duvall and Hayes, chap. 16, pp. 355-381).

5.2 RHETORIC. What “rhetorical features” (hyperbole, questions, commands, irony, parable, allegory, allusion, etc.) does your passage display? Rhetoric is a term we use for persuasion. Certain literary techniques will drive home a point you are trying to make. You must determine how any rhetorical features the human author uses to drive home his point. (It helps to remember that these writing were meant to be heard, so they are written for performance. Most people were illiterate and depended on others to read these biblical texts). How do these rhetorical features help with understanding the passage?

5.3 GRAMMAR.

For Advanced or Tech astute Students: (You may wish to use a Bible software program that identifies Greek and Hebrew words and grammar behind the English. Then you can look up the grammatical terms in the helpful resources, *Biblical Hebrew Companion* or *Biblical Greek Companion for Bible Software Users*).

Go verse by verse and identify the conjunctions, subjects, verbs, and direct and indirect objects. Then note their specific grammatical form (e.g., verbs can be different moods and different tenses. The software will identify this form for you). Then ask yourself, what insight does this grammatic form give you (in other words, the author could have chosen to use a present tense that implies ongoing action, but he chose a perfect tense which implies past completed action with results that continue into the present). *This section is best done in the original languages; however, if you compare translations, you will begin to recognize some unusual grammar.*

For all students: Make a chart and identify the parts of speech (conjunctions, subjects, verbs, direct and indirect objects. If you have time, note the adjectives and adverbs that give more description)

5.3.2 List here any difficult or unusual grammatical features of your text

Verse #	Conjunction	Subject (noun or noun clause)	Verb (action)	Direct Object	Indirect Object
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5.3.3 Determine which of the grammatical features above are important for you to investigate further and give your reasons why. Make a list and check with a good exegetical commentary to see if they discuss the grammatical feature. You will want to include the most important features for your paper.

5.4 **WORD STUDIES.** (Note well Duvall and Hayes' discussion and warnings regarding word studies, chap. 9, pp. 165-192.)

5.4.1 Note here any words which are crucial to the passage, repeated, figures of speech, or that are unclear, puzzling, or difficult.

5.4.2 For this notebook choose **one of the words** listed in 5.4.1 and determine the possible meanings of the word in the original Greek or Hebrew using The S.T.E.P. program (Scripture Tools for Every Person) available for free at www.stepbible.org.

Begin by identifying the Greek or Hebrew word (Duvall and Hayes, pp. 176-178 show you how to use S.T.E.P. for this task).

5.4.3. Determine how the word is used in different contexts (the rest of the Testament you are working in) and by whom.

Check all the occurrences of the Greek or Hebrew word using the "search for this word" feature in S.T.E.P. (See Duvall and Hayes explanation, pp. 178-180). *This step will take time, but it is essential for faithful interpretation.*

5.4.4 What are the ranges of meanings for this word in the author's own usage elsewhere? Are any of these usages unique to the OT or NT?

Louw & Nida's lexicon on semantic ranges of words is quite helpful for NT work. Try using the interactive online lexicon at <https://www.laparola.net/greco/louwnida.php> (Type in the English word and the Greek will pop up. Since you know your Greek word, click on the right one and you will be given a range of possible meanings.)

5.4.5 Which meaning is most likely here and why? (Use the questions suggested by Duvall and Hayes, pp. 181-183 to help you determine the best meaning for your passage).

STEP 6. CULTURAL CONTEXT

6.1 List features of your text that you suspect might be clarified by a greater knowledge of Jewish or Greco-Roman history and culture.

6.2 Choose one of these and, using the bibliography in Duvall and Hayes (pp. 120-134), explore the cultural background a little further and explain how this study may aid in an understanding of the cultural milieu of the author.

6.3 Evaluate the significance of this background data for the understanding of your passage.

STEP 7. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONTEXTS

7.1 How does your passage compare to other passages in Scripture which address similar issues?

7.2 What would be lost or how would the message of the Bible be less complete if your passage did not exist?

7.3 What is the theological importance of your passage?

STEP 8. ACCUMULATE A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF SECONDARY SOURCES AND READ WIDELY.

8.1 Find a combination of at least 6 commentaries, books, or academic or pastoral journal articles which deal with your passage and read the contributions of other scholars. List the sources here using the correct Turabian style).

8.2 What are some of the most significant differences (presuppositional, theological, hermeneutical, etc.) between your approach and that of some authors you have read?

8.3 State a few places where you will use other scholars' work to SUPPORT your conclusions, indicating some quotations from them worthy of citing in your paper. *"Be careful not to let them dictate what you conclude about the passage. Be critical of your sources and do not be afraid to disagree with commentators. As always, cite your sources so as not to plagiarize,"* (Duvall and Hayes, *Grasping God's Word*, p. 506).

8.4 State a few places where significant differences between you and some scholar(s) demand that you deal with their views in your paper and show why they are wrong. *You need not write your full refutation here.*

8.5 Hypothesize what the passage of Scripture you chose to investigate means. Then write out a well-crafted preliminary thesis statement that either explains how you will interpret the

significance of the subject matter or question under discussion, what to expect from the rest of the project/paper, and/or makes a claim that others might dispute. *A thesis statement is an essential part of any graduate project/paper, so you need to identify enough resources to support the claims being made. A thesis is often revised once you have gathered enough supporting evidence to begin your Final Project/Paper. The more quality attention is given here, the better your final project will be.*

Sermons may not use this written thesis, but they should reflect the preparation that went into the sermon and a thesis statement (reflected in the Big Idea) is an important part.

YOU ARE NOW READY TO WRITE/PRODUCE YOUR PROJECT (PAPER, SERMON, ETC.)!