

EXEGETICAL PROCESS NOTEBOOK¹

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PASSAGE: Isaiah 55:8-11

“The aim of exegesis is to make as explicit as possible the precise meaning of a text.

This is done when the proper connotation of the words and concepts are found and when the text is placed in the context of the presuppositions, questions, and concerns of its author.”

--A. Malherbe

Instructions: Use this template for your investigation of a biblical text and answer the questions thoroughly and with supporting evidence. Include scriptural references for easy referral later when you begin to write your papers. There are no page limits for any of the steps(in this notebook), just be satisfied that you have adequately gathered all that you can (time permitting).

This “Exegetical Process Notebook” is your *WORK PRODUCT* that lays the foundation for the final paper. It is *NOT* the paper itself, but it contains everything you need to know about your passage before you decide which theological connections to make.

Important Working Assumptions:

1. Recognize that what you think initially about a text (without prayerful critical reflection) is not the same as what the Holy Spirit intends. Let each author and each passage have its own voice within its own context before ever attempting to apply it to yourself or a ministry/counseling context.
2. The original audience is different from us in most every way possible except for their basic human condition and need of Christ. This includes language, culture, social values and norms, religious worldview, politics, family structure, etc. Consider this notebook as your *PASSPORT* into the foreign country of the original human author and recipients. Do not assume you will understand the language or customs of these ancient peoples without preparing for this journey.

¹ Adapted from Dr. William Barclay, Gordon Conwell
<http://www.gordonconwell.edu/charlotte/current/documents/chareg-nt502-barclay-su12.pdf> Accessed Sept. 1, 2016. Also, from Gordon Fee, *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*. Third edition. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002. Refer to the appropriate sections of Fee’s text for further clarifications and discussions.

3. The nature of inspiration is such that God used every day, flawed individuals to preserve a trustworthy/true authoritative message that is efficacious for salvation. Thus, eventually shift your attention *from* solving the identity of the original author *to* understanding the message being conveyed.
4. With every interpretive act you are creating sacred space in which to encounter a free and living God.
5. Do not assume the message will simply reaffirm cherished beliefs. Surprisingly at times, God's message is just as much a word against us as a word for us.

STEP 1. SURVEY THE GENERAL HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Read the entire document through in English in one sitting 1.1 AUTHOR. (a) **What do you observe about the identity of the author and his circumstances?** (b) **What else do you know about the life of the author and his situation at the time of writing that might influence the exegesis of this text?**

Always start with the biblical book in front of you. You can learn quite a bit about the author from his own words (e.g. is he in prison or under duress of some kind, etc.). Make your own observations; then check the secondary literature (New Testament and Old Testament Introductions, Critical Commentaries, Critical Bible Dictionaries) to see what they add to your initial observations.

- *The Book of Isaiah was written by the Prophet Isaiah.*
- *Prophesied to the people of Israel.*
- *Return to God & seek His favor and guidance*
- *Main prophesies included: warnings, the coming of the Messiah and the need for faith.*
- *Isaiah is broken into three sections: (1) prophesies; (2) teachings; and (3) the song of Isaiah*
- *Many of his prophesies were fulfilled during his lifetime*

1.2. RECIPIENTS: (a) **What are your observations about the identity of the recipients?** *Be careful to base your observations on what the text says, not what you have always heard.* (b) **Are there any hints about their ethnicity or socioeconomic and cultural contexts?** (c) **Where do the recipients live?** *Are there direct or indirect hints that help you identify the geographic region?* (d) **What are their present circumstances?** (e) **What historical situation occasioned this writing?** (f) **What is the relationship between the author and the recipients?**

- N/A

1.3 PURPOSE: (1) **What can you discern about the author's purpose for writing?** Does the author explicitly say anything about it, or is the purpose implied (through suggestive clues)? *Be attentive here. Authors share certain preunderstandings with their audience that need not be stated (i.e., the author and recipients are privy to information well-known to each that we would have no way of knowing). Your job will be to make the implicit clear, i.e., what is implied needs to be explained carefully.* (2) **What is the overall theme or concern?** *Did you notice words or ideas that were frequently repeated? Did you notice special word choices or exhortations/ideas that fit the overall presentation? What might these repetitions, vocabulary, or ideas tell you about the purpose of the writing?* (3) **Does the argument or narrative have an easily discerned outline, or does it seem to be a loose, thematic collection of sayings or teachings** (e.g. Sermon on the Mount or James)? *You need not work out the outline here, just observe!*

- To assure the people that God's promises are sure and He will fulfill them.
- Observation: open quotes never closed. Why?

STEP 2. CONFIRM THE LIMITS OF YOUR PASSAGE.

Decide where your *pericope* [i.e., "self-contained unit"] begins and ends. *Examine whether or not the paragraphs and divisions in your bibles correctly reflect the limits of your chosen passage.*

It is best to compare the paragraphing of several modern translations (e.g. NRSV, TNIV, NET, AV, NASB, NKJV, etc. Fee, p. 12). Where do the translation differ as far as paragraph length and divisions? Then decide for yourself what the basic unit is. (Your conclusions should be based on your own observations from these texts). *The final decision is part of the exegetical process. Choose passages approximately 5-10 verses for a project this size.*

"The passage I intend to investigate is N/A." It is intended to persuade the Israelites to

STEP 3. BECOME THOROUGHLY ACQUAINTED WITH YOUR PARAGRAPH/PERICOPE (Fee, 12).

3.1. Read the paragraph through in 5-7 translations and *note the differences* among the translations. *List the differences here.* (WHY DO THIS STEP? Without knowledge of biblical languages one can miss the different options translators have when moving from one language to another. *THERE IS NO ONE TO ONE CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN LANGUAGES.*)

For example:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, (Phil. 2:5 NRS)

You should have the same attitude toward one another that Christ Jesus had (Phi 2:5

NET)

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, (Phi 2:5 ESV)

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: (Phi 2:5

NIV)

Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus, (Phi 2:5

NAB)

3.2 Determine which of these differences are exegetically significant (e.g. are the differences a matter of synonyms, grammar, stylistic or theological preference, or textual criticism? Do these differences alter the meaning in any way? Does a particular translation have slightly different theological implications? Which is closer to the original author's meaning given the overall argument?)

In the above example on language comparison, notice the difference between the choice of "same mind," "same attitude," "same mindset," or "this mind." Do these synonyms mean the same thing? What does each add to the meaning of the text?

Explain these differences as far as you can (develop a hypothesis of which translation you think is the best rendering of the passage and explain why this hypothesis best explains these differences based on supporting evidence). *Pay particular attention to marginal notes that usually refer to matters of textual criticism.*

STEP 4: LITERARY CONTEXT

4.1 Identify the particular literary character of the document (i.e., narratives, psalms, law, Gospel, prophecy, epistle, apocalypse, etc.) and be alert to the fact that specific genre issues will arise.

For **epistles**, do you suspect the letter is *ad hoc* (addressing a specific local situation), formal (perhaps meant for a wider general audience), casual (friendly and exhortative), or perhaps more representative of a treatise or extended sermon (e.g. Hebrews) than a letter (Fee, 17)? *This observation is foundational before working through the next steps.*

For **narratives**, is your pericope/passage a narration of an event or a specific teaching/saying aimed at a particular group or character (e.g., parable, prophetic utterance, poetic utterance, etc.)? Consider whether this story or saying employs metaphor, overstatement, irony, etc. that will need further investigation (Fee, 23-24; WHY DO THIS STEP? *You are not going to approach a letter in the same way you approach a narrative that has character, plot, and dialogue. You would not interpret a psalm in the same way you would interpret one of the commandments of Moses. There are different expectations and techniques associated with different kinds of literature*

1. **(Epistle) To what formal structure of an ancient letter does your particular text belong? Is it part of the initial greeting? Is it part of the thanksgiving period typical of Paul's letters? Will this affect your exegesis in any way? (Fee, 17).**
2. **(Narrative) Does your narrative describe an event, highlight a character/s, include dialogue, sayings, OT quotations or allusions, attitudes to emulate or avoid, etc. (a) How does the dialogue and interaction of characters illumine attitudes or behavior? (b) Does the event highlight something presented earlier in the text, or does it prepare us for something about to follow? (c) If you removed your passage from the larger narrative, how would our understanding of this event or saying be affected? Be careful of over exegeting and making the section say more than it does.**

4.3 Give an **original, detailed outline of the whole book and note the placement of your text within the outline.** Do not use the outlines you find by scholars as they lean toward a particular theological position that may/may not reflect your own reading of the entire book. The more you struggle to do these steps yourself, the better you will get at thinking theologically and exegetically.

Use any method that makes sense to you.

WHY DO THIS STEP?

1. By providing an original outline the text's own voice moves forward, while previous points of view or agendas are forced to recede. This step slows one down and forces a closer reading of the entire passage that often reveals previously overlooked details or patterns such as the overall inter-connection of the whole, how the ideas build upon one another, or how the stories, sayings, or events prepare you for what follows.
2. You will better situate your passage within the flow of the larger argument of the biblical book, which is the next step in an exegetical investigation.

5.1 STRUCTURE, SYNTAX, AND LOGIC OF ARGUMENT.

WHY DO THIS STEP?

Every author has a structure in mind when writing a narrative or letter. Note how the author prepares the hearer-reader for what follows (Ask yourself, "What leads into my text?" and "What leads out of this text?"). There is always some logical coherence and structure in the way a letter or story is told. Our job is to figure out this structure and determine how our passage functions to communicate a particular theological perspective.

5.1.1. Analyze the structure of your pericope.

Use your own method for organizing and asking questions. Think logically and grammatically. Exegesis is about asking good questions. Questions about structure include:

- a. **Adverbial questions** answer: When? Why? Under what conditions/circumstances? How? Where? For what purpose? Etc.
- b. **Adjectival questions** answer: What kind of? Which? How many? Whose?

5.1.3 **Set out briefly the logic and content of your text** (How does the author unfold each step in his argument? At what point does he reach the main thought or idea?). Show the significance of your paragraph in the overall development of the argument/exhortation/story, etc? (Fee, 19-20).

WHY DO THIS STEP?

It is an unfortunate truth that most pastors and seminary students can describe the content of a biblical passage, but they have no clue as to the development of a biblical author's argument or position. This leads to misunderstandings and a proliferation of clichés that have no power to address the needs of the contemporary context.

Hyperbole: exaggerated statements or claims not meant to be taken literally.

Questions: sentences that draw the hearer-reader into an active role by requiring them to provide the

Information or answer (has the effect of making people commit to a position)

Commands: authoritative orders; forces one to inquire as to the legitimacy of the authority as well as

Respond to the request

Irony: Expressing meaning by using language usually signaling the opposite of what one meant (often

Humorous)

Parable: Succinct, didactic story that illustrates one or more instructive lessons or principles

Allegory: literary devices/rhetorical devices that convey hidden meanings through symbolic figures,

Actions, imagery, and/or events, which together create the moral, spiritual, or political meaning the author wishes to convey.

Allusion: an expression designed to call something to mind without mentioning it explicitly; an indirect,

Or passing reference (most often from the Hebrew Scriptures-Old Testament).

5.4 LEXICOGRAPHY.

Identify any words which are “theologically loaded,” ambiguous, repeated or emphasized by the author.

5.4.2. Choose one or two of these words listed in 5.4.1 and look them up in a concordance to see where they are used elsewhere in your book and how context brings out different nuances of the meaning. *Be reflective. There is no right or wrong... just be thoughtful in your observations.*

5.4.3 next, look up the word in one of the Hebrew or Greek lexicons provided in Accordance and notice the ranges of meanings for this word. Which best fits the context?

STEP 6. CULTURAL CONTEXT

6.1 List features of your text, which you suspect might be illuminated or explained by a greater knowledge of Jewish, or Greco Roman history and culture.

WHY DO THIS STEP? The gap between an ancient culture and the contemporary context is great. They shared common knowledge about religion, society, and cultural values that we know nothing about. By studying these background issues you avoid anachronism (assuming a society remote in time from us shares our culture or perspectives) and ethnocentrism (assuming the values of another society are the same as ours).

6.2 Choose one of these ancient issues noted in 6.1 and, using supplementary commentaries, explore the cultural background a little further and (b) 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. CANONICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONTEXTS

7.1 How does your passage compare to other passages in Scripture, which address similar issues? (Fee 31-32)

7.2 What does your passage contribute to the overall teaching of this subject in the Bible?
What specifically would be lost or how would the message of the Bible be less complete if your passage did not exist?

7.3 What are the theological implications of your passage?

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

WHY DO THIS STEP LAST? Scholars and secondary sources are your conversation partners. Learn to ask questions of their perspective, argue with them, listen attentively to their point of view, and then state why you think your perspective is just as valid or more valid, much like you would do if having this conversation at Starbucks. To start with their positions without having investigated the issues yourself is the lazy way out of doing the hard work of exegesis . . . in fact, without doing your own investigation you cannot claim to have exegeted the passage to your congregation or to your peers.

3.1 Find at least 5 commentaries, books or journal articles, which deal with your passage and read the contributions of other scholars. List the sources here. *DO NOT USE MATTHEW HENRY OR OTHER DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARIES! These may add some additional insight, but remember, they did not have access to the most recent manuscript or archeological discoveries nor did they live in the complexity of our modern context.*

8.2 What are some of the most significant differences between your approach and that of some authors you have read?

8.3 State a few places where significant differences between you and some scholar(s)

YOU ARE NOW READY TO WRITE/PRODUCE YOUR PAPER.

Final paper for EPN project should include:

1. Introduction: Why you chose the passage e.g. its importance in contemporary times, its value in significant areas of your life and mental or spiritual health, or its application to the counseling arena.

II. Body of Paper: Describe the significant information you collected and researched upon doing the EPN project .

III. Conclusion: How your research has influenced your understanding of the passage and your future use of it in personal life, ministry and/or counseling.

This notebook is a modification of the work created by Dr. Julie Cox and taught by Dr. Eunny Lee in the "Biblical Exegesis" course at ATS.