

STAGE 3: PRAY AND DO ADDITIONAL EXEGESIS: DO DEEPER INTERPRETATION, THEN MAKE ADJUSTMENTS TO THE SERMON STRUCTURE

After doing an initial analysis of the passage that you will be preaching on, and having developed an initial outline, the next stage is to do deeper interpretation of the passage, namely exegesis.

Our English word Exegesis comes from the Greek word, "exègeisthai" (to interpret). It is a compound word (made up of more than one word joined together), and is made up of the words, "ex-" (which mean "out") + hègeisthai (which means "to lead"). Exegesis is the process of interpreting and analysing the Biblical text in order to discover the most accurate original meaning. In other words, exegesis tries to find out exactly what God is saying in His word before deciding on what it means for us today and how it applies to our lives. When you do exegesis, you are an "exegete" (noun) who is "exegeting" (verb) the text. What you are doing is described as being "exegetical" (adverb). In its most basic Bible-relevant meaning, exegesis means finding out what the Spirit originally was saying through its author in that Bible passage.

Eisegesis, on the other hand, is the opposite incorrect approach of interpreting passages by reading back into them a particular belief that is not at all evident or clear. "Eisegesis" is also a compound Greek word from: "eis-" (into) + hègeisthai (to lead). It is done when we "read back into" the Bible what we think is there, on the basis of what we think it says and means. Eisegesis happens when people have their own preconceived ideas or presuppositions (e.g. their "pet" doctrines or ideas) and then read these back into the Bible. It can happen when we have a certain belief and then we find verses that agree with our beliefs, e.g. "the Bible says we should not judge". It happens when preachers don't take the time to interpret a Scripture properly. Instead of doing exegesis they already find other Scriptures that confirm a certain interpretation of the text.

In this way the Bible can actually be used to manipulate people to do things that are wrong and to believe false doctrines. False teachers use people's respect for the word of God and combine it with their wrong motives and false teaching to manipulate people to do things that are ironically contrary to what god wants them to do. It is rare for someone to be called an 'eisegete', because eisegesis has a well-earned negative reputation. Eisegesis is dangerous and it is the ignorant and "lazy man's" method of "interpretation".

- ❑ 2 Peter 3:16 He [Paul] writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

Are you eisegeting? What does the Bible say about the following:

- This verse is correct isn't it?: "money is the root of all evil" (1 Timothy 6:10)
- Complete the verse: "..... Is next to godliness" (Hezekiah 3:2)
- Is poverty a virtue?
- Is it wrong for a Christian to drink wine or alcohol?
- Should Christians tithe? Give a reason for your answer.
- Should priests and pastors remain unmarried like the apostle Paul?
- Should women be allowed to preach?
- Should Christians get tattoos?

As mentioned before, exegesis forms part of the larger process of hermeneutics:

**HERMENEUTICS =
A Devotional Study of the Bible (as a way of life)
+ A Detailed Analysis of the Text
+ An In-Depth Exegesis of the text,
Using Proper Hermeneutical Principles**

1. The Grammatical-Historical-Cultural Method of Exegesis

In order to do exegesis, you will need exegetical tools. There are a great many books that will all help with the work of exegesis. The primary method used by non-liberal interpreters is the Grammatical-Historical-Cultural method of exegesis. As can be seen by the title, in order to understand the Bible, 3 major areas are researched:

A. "Grammatical" Studies

Here the focus is on the grammar (languages) of the Bible. The original languages are studied in order to understand exactly what the text means in its original form. Initially no attempt is made to find modern ways to explain it. So word studies are made, as well as investigation of sentence structures. The most reliable manuscripts are consulted. This is the level at which people trained in the languages do exegesis. However there are many tools available to those who would like to do a grammatical exegesis of the text, albeit at a less technical level. Tools such as interlinear bibles, books on word studies and commentaries can all help preachers do an exegesis of the meaning of the original languages. This will help them a lot in interpreting a passage properly so that they will preach as "accurately" and objectively as possible. I.e. they will not read their own beliefs or ideas back into biblical passages and make it say what it was not meant to say. This is eisegesis. As an example, Vine's complete expository dictionary of Old and New Testament Words" is a good resource for doing word studies.

B. "Historical" Studies

Many of the events in the Bible took place at a place in time that is far removed from the contemporary hearer, i.e. at a different time in history. People in the past experienced life differently to the way in which they do it today. Many things were different. For example, at one point in time people believed that the earth was flat, based partly on misinterpretations of verses like Revelation 7:1:

- ❑ "After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree".

Exegetes also try to understand the original historical situation that existed when the Holy Spirit first gave the message. Conservative scholars believe that the bible contains actual historical events, that occurred in existing places on earth and involved people who once lived on earth. Therefore we believe that by understanding how the original recipients would have understood the word of God when it was first given to them, we can also better understand the Scriptures. For example, we believe that Moses and the Israelites actually crossed the Red Sea on dry land; that Jonah was actually swallowed by a large sea creature and that Jesus performed actual miracles.

Exegetes will therefore try to understand what the words of Scripture meant to the original hearers before they try to apply it to our lives today. For example Micah 6:8 says that the Lord wants us to “act justly”, and the whole book of Micah highlights many practices that were corrupt and unjust in Israel in Micah’s day. By doing some research of what these practices were, we can better understand what it means to “act justly”. Historians have left us with good records and the biblical interpreter should use these resources to understand the Bible.

C. “Cultural” Studies

The Bible was written to people belonging a wide variety of cultures and nationalities. Of course, every culture has its own unique customs, mannerisms, beliefs and outlook on life. These differ a lot from the cultures around us today. Often people from one culture find it difficult to understand a different culture and this can result in misunderstandings and even in conflict. For example in white cultures today if a person doesn’t look you in the eye he is regarded as being deceitful and up to no good. In the black culture however to look a person in the eyes is a sign of disrespect. Then again to look someone in the eyes can be a sign of defiance and a challenge. For people in love they can’t stop looking into each other’s eyes!

So when interpreting the Bible, we have to identify the cultural practices that are part for the text. Then we can understand why certain things were done, and then interpret the practices correctly.

When doing exegesis, we first need to identify what aspects of Biblical practices are culture based, and what are not. Then we need to decide which practices are trans-cultural, and which are culture-bound? Transcultural practices are those practices which apply to all cultures. Culturally-bound practices are those which are culture-specific – they are done in certain cultures only and have a specific meaning and reflect a specific way of life related to that culture. For example:

- ❑ 1Co 11:14 Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, 1Co 11:15 but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering.

Compare the following Scriptures to see how translators have taken the cultural context into consideration:

- ❑ 1Th 5:26 Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. KJV (word-for-word)
- ❑ 1Th 5:26 Give the Lord’s followers a warm greeting. CEV (thought-for-thought)

There are several books that help interpret the cultural practices found in the bible, such as James M. Freeman’s “Manners and Customs of the Bible”. Understanding the dynamics of cross-cultural translation is very important for missionary work because missionaries often have to work across cultures

2. Consult Different Types of Commentaries

Next exegesis can be done by consulting Bible commentaries. Bible commentaries are books written by people who have done an in-depth study of the books of the Bible or of the whole bible. They explain the books of the Bible in depth, and are almost like a greatly expanded ‘Study Bible’, except that they focus on one book of the Bible at a time. They can therefore go into far greater depth. There are different type of commentaries, each written for different purposes and having different readers in mind:

- a. Critical commentaries. These are commentaries that do an in-depth study of the book based on the original languages. They also look at the structure and meaning of the original languages, and also different textual variants. They are quite technical and are aimed at scholars, Bible translators, and pastors and Christian leaders who have studied the Biblical languages.
- b. Translators Handbooks. These are commentaries used by people who translate the Bible into other languages. They can be used by people who have not studied the original languages, but have a very good understanding of the language into which the Bible will be translated. They give the meanings of words and phrases and show different ways that words and phrases can be translated into the new language. People who assist with translating the Bible will sit on a team with people who do know the original Bible languages and together they will work to find ways to translate the Bible into the new language.
- c. Commentaries for Preachers, Preachers and Christian Leaders. These are commentaries written to assist preachers, pastors and other Christian leaders to study the Bible and to preach and teach it correctly. Often they are a mix of technical details plus simple explanations of how the text could be applied. These commentaries have varying degrees of technical content, explanations and illustrations. Some of them can lean very strongly towards being commentaries for use in preaching.
- d. Devotional "Layman" Commentaries. These are commentaries written for all believers who would like to study the Bible in more depth without going in to too much technical details. They are written with clear explanations, plenty of illustrations and will offer many suggestions of how the text could be applied to life.

As can be seen from the above, all of these commentaries have their own strengths. When doing exegesis and sermon preparation, preachers can use different types of commentaries because they will all make unique contributions to the messages being preached. Fortunately many commentaries can be found in electronic form. However many good commentaries have not been converted from print, and leaders will do well to invest in them when they can be found. Many can be found in second-hand bookshops. Often commentaries have been compiled by one publisher, and compromise a whole series – one for each book of the Bible. There is even a book written listing almost every commentary in print and includes a brief evaluation of the commentaries.

3. Additional Resources:

There are several other resource-tools that interpreters can use when interpreting a passage. These are not all strictly speaking exegetical tools in the sense that they help approach the actual Biblical text directly. However when we use a broader definition of interpretation as being to help us interpret the Bible with a view to preparing sermons, then they are helpful. If the exegesis was done with a view to newly translating the Bible from the original languages to a national language, they would probably not be used as much.

- a. Reading sermons on the same text and topic. Often other preachers have prepared sermons on the same text and theme that you will, and their sermons often will have helpful content for your sermon.
- b. For topical studies you could consult Bible Dictionaries. There are also a good many books that teach at length about one Bible topic. For example there many books on giving, grace, parenting – that are teachings based on the Bible. When teaching on one of these topics, it is good practice to consult these books.

c. For sermons that have to do with doctrinal teachings, such as for example what the Bible teaches about heaven and hell, books on Systematic Theology are useful. There are also books and theological journals that have articles on specific passages in the Bible that are not easy to interpret, such as:

- ❑ Exo_9:12 But **the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart** and he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the LORD had said to Moses.

Compare:

- ❑ Exo_8:32 But this time also Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let the people go.
- ❑ 1Jn 5:16 If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. **There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that.**
- ❑ 1Pe 3:18 For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, 1Pe 3:19 through whom also he went and **preached to the spirits in prison** 1Pe 3:20 who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water,

4. Developing A More Accurate Outline

After sufficient exegesis has been done it will be time to review the initial sermon outline that was based on an analysis of good English translations of the Bible only. After the exegesis, you may find that the structure has changed a little bit, and make alterations to your outline. You may have also discovered greater meaning behind words and phrases and will want to change your points and sub-points. So after the work of exegesis, make changes to the sermon's outline as necessary.

The process of exegesis will also have yielded a lot of material for explanations, illustrations and applications – all as a bonus!