METHODS IN NEW TESTAMENT EXEGESIS
by Matthew McDill

Understanding the message of the New Testament is essential to the spiritual vitality of

the believer and the church. When one attempts to interpret the Bible, he is venturing into the

fields of exegesis and hermeneutics. What is exegesis and how does it relate to hermeneutics?

Exegesis comes from a Greek word that can be translated "narrative, description, explanation,

interpretation."[1] Hermeneutics also comes from a Greek word and can be translated

"interpretation, exposition."[2] However, "Biblical scholars do not agree on the semantic range of

these words, *exegesis* and *hermeneutics*."[3] Most scholars seem to agree with Walter Kaiser's

definition of exegesis: "the *practice* of and the set of *procedures* for discovering the author's

intended meaning."[4] Hermeneutics is generally presented as a broader topic. Grant Osborn

reports that traditionally hermeneutics has meant "that science which delineates principles or

methods for interpreting an individual author's meaning."[5]

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[1]Frederick William Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 349.

[2]Ibid., 393.

[3]William D. Thompson, *Preaching Biblically: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), 14.

[4]Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 47. See also Victor Paul Furnish, "Some Practical Guidelines for New Testament Exegesis," *Perkins Journal* (Spring, 1973): 1; Gordon D. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1983), 27; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles*, In *Guides to New Testament Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 20; Grant. R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1991), 5; and *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, s.v. "Interpretation of the Bible, " by F. F. Bruce, 565.

[5]Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 5. See also Furnish, "Practical Guidelines," 2.

What is the relationship between exegesis and hermeneutics?[6] No doubt one will find many different answers to this question. Grant Osborne provides a clear and pragmatic viewpoint that is adopted for this paper: "Hermeneutics encompasses both what it meant and what it means. . . . Hermeneutics is the overall term while exegesis and 'contextualization' (the cross-cultural communication of a text's significance for today) are the two aspects of that larger task."[7] Based on a similar but modified division of hermeneutics and the following arguments of this paper, one may diagram the work of hermeneutics as follows.

Table 1. Hermeneutics

HERMENEUTICS			
EXEGESIS		EXPOSITION	
Historical Analysis	Linguistic Analysis	Theology	Contextualization

There is no one procedure for determining the meaning of a text. Many methodologies and perspectives are available for exegesis, none of which "can claim to provide the one authentic understanding of any given NT text."[8] I. Howard Marshall argues for a synthesis of methods: "In interpreting a passage a number of different lines of investigation must be followed."[9] What lines of investigation should be included and in what order should the

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[6]A study of the history of exegesis would also be helpful for an inquiry into exegetical methodology, but it will not be treated within the limits of this paper.

[7]Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 5. See also F. F. Bruce, "Interpretation of the Bible," 565.

[8]Joel B. Green, "The Challenge of Hearing the New Testament," In *Hearing the New Testament*, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 9.

[9]I. Howard Marshall, "Introduction," In *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods*, ed. I. Howard Marshall (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 15.

exegete proceed? This paper will attempt to answer these questions by surveying the methods

available for exegesis and constructing a step-by-step synthesis of those which are most useful.

Presuppositions

Before a person can construct an exegetical method, he must establish the perspective

and goals with which he wants to approach the Scripture. Everyone who attempts to interpret the

Bible brings presuppositions to the text.[10] "It may be useful to distinguish between the personal

factors which affect the judgment of the interpreter (prejudices) and the philosophical or

theological starting point which an interpreter takes and which he usually shares with some

others (presuppositions)."[11] Rudolf Bultmann argues that the exegete must not have any

prejudices concerning the outcome of the exegesis, but that presuppositions are inevitable and

necessary.[12]

The presuppositions concerning Scripture upon which this exegetical method is built

are expressed well by Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard:[13] The Bible is God's inspired revelation;[14]

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[10]See Rudolf Bultmann, "Is Exegesis Without Presuppositions Possible?" In *Existence and Faith: Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann* (New York: Living Age Books, 1960), 289; and William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 1993) 8, 87.

[11]Graham N. Stanton, "Presuppositions in New Testament Criticism," In *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods*, ed. I. Howard Marshall (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 61.

[12]Bultmann, "Exegesis Without Presuppositions," 289–291.

[13]Klein *et al*, *Biblical Interpretation*, 88–92.

[14]See also Thompson, *Preaching Biblically*, 17–19.

it is authoritative and true;[15] it is a spiritual document (and therefore can change lives); it is characterized by both unity and diversity; and it is understandable. Another presupposition is that the meaning of the text is discovered by grasping the original message intended by the author.[16] The ultimate goal of the interpretation of Scripture is to discern the normative truth of God for today and apply it to daily living.[17] When one seeks this truth by identifying the intention of the author, the text becomes the main focus of exegesis.[18]

If the exegete is seeking to identify the author's historical message by studying the text, then he will construct an exegetical methodology in the tradition of grammatico-storical exegesis.[19] Grammatico-historical exegesis determines the meaning of a passage by observing the grammar of the text and the historical setting in which it was written.[20] "If the text of Scripture is the central concern, then a mastery of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek is a basic requirement. . . . The serious exegete should learn to master the basic principles of Greek and Hebrew grammar and syntax."[21] In addition to this methodological perspective and skills in

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[15]See also James Emery White, "Inspiration and Authority of Scripture," In *Foundations for Biblical Interpretation: A Complete Library of Tools and Resources*, ed., David S. Dockery, Kenneth A. Matthews, and Robert B. Sloan (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 19.

[16]See Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 7; and Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 46–47, 88.

[17]Klein *et al*, *Biblical Interpretation*, 19.

[18]See David S. Dockery, "Study and Interpretation of the Bible," In *Foundations for Biblical Interpretation: A Complete Library of Tools and Resources*, ed., David S. Dockery, Kenneth A. Matthews, and Robert B. Sloan (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 50–51; Eduard Haller, "On the Interpretive Task," *Interpretation* 21 (1967): 161; and Furnish, "Practical Guidelines," 1.

[19]See Bultmann, "Exegesis Without Presuppositions," 291 (Bultmann calls it "the historical method"); and Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 88.

[20]See Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 87.

[21]See Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 48–49. See also Haller, "Interpretive Task," 158; Furnish, "Practical Guidelines," 11; Klein *et al*, *Biblical Interpretation*, 201, 203–204; David Alan Black, *Using*

biblical languages, the exegete should bring to the text an attitude of faith. His relationship to

God, his surrender to authority of God's Word, and the work of the Holy Spirit are vital to his

understanding Scripture.[22] Eduard Haller warns, "I can walk the road of exegesis rightly only . . .

if I resist the temptation of divorcing intellectual activity and the listening attitude of faith."[23]

Exegetical Steps

Every biblical scholar uses a different set of exegetical steps, uses different terms and

definitions, and places them in a different sequence. Table 2 is a comparison of selected

exegetical methods. Of the sources consulted for this paper, seventeen of the authors proposed an

exegetical method. Some wrote an entire book on their method, while others simply included an

outline in an article. Some wrote with specific goals and contexts: Moises Silva wrote

concerning Galatians;[24] Scot McKnight addresses the interpretation of the Synoptic Gospels,[25]

Thomas Schreiner the Pauline epistles,[26] and Gary Burge the Gospel of John.[27]

Every exegetical step or approach that is mentioned by these authors is included at the

left of the table; there are twenty in all. Although the authors used different terms to name these

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New Testament Greek in Ministry: A Practical Guide for Students and Pastors (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 16–31; Schreiner, *Pauline Epistles*, 58–59; and Abraham J. Malherbe, "An Introduction: The Task and Method of Exegesis," *Restoration Quarterly* 5 (1961): 173.

[22]Dockery, "Study and Interpretation," 49.

[23]Haller, "Interpretive Task," 163.

[24] Moises Silva, *Interpreting Galatians: Explorations in Exegetical Method* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001).

[25]Scot McKnight, *Interpreting the Synoptic Gospels*, In *Guides to New Testament Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988).

[26]Schreiner, *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles*.

steps, most of the terms in the table are self–explanatory or familiar. Those terms that are not

clear will be explained below. The intersection of the authors and the exegetical steps are shaded

in when the author utilizes that step. Of the twenty exegetical approaches, David Black uses the

most (17), then Osborne and McKnight (10). Those approaches that are used the most by the

seventeen authors are syntactical analysis and lexical analysis (16), historical background (15),

and textual criticism (14). Those approaches that were used the least include historical criticism

(4), form criticism and other critical issues (6), and source criticism, the use of secondary

literature (explicitly mentioned by the author), and biblical theology (7).

Some of these terms require further explanation and each step should be evaluated for

its contribution to exegesis. All the scholars consulted make some reference to "history" and the

text. Some of the terms include "historical criticism," "historical context," "historical

background," and "historical setting." The term "historical criticism" is used most frequently to

refer to the historical-critical method, which seeks to verify the truth content of historical

accounts.[28] Although this method is traditionally executed with skepticism, "historical criticism"

can be used to resolve historical problems found in the text.[29]

"Historical context," "background," and "setting" all refer to the situation and time-

period in which the literature was written. This historical inquiry includes the introductory issues

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[27] Burge, Gary M. Interpreting the Gospel of John. In Guides to New Testament Exegesis. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992.

[28] See Craig L. Blomberg, "Historical Criticism of the New Testament," In *Foundations for Biblical Interpretation: A Complete Library of Tools and Resources*, ed., David S. Dockery, Kenneth A. Matthews, and Robert B. Sloan (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 415; McKnight, *Interpreting the Synoptic Gospels*, 57ff.; and I. Howard Marshall, "Historical Criticism," In *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods*, ed. I. Howard Marshall (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 126. Marshall also uses this term to refer to the study of the historical background.

[29] Marshall, "Historical Criticism," 135.

of a passage (such as author, recipients, provenance, date, occasion, purpose, etc.) and the

broader historical context of that time period.[30] Studies in the broader historical context include

investigations in geography, archeology, culture, religion, politics,[31] society,[32] economics, and

military and war.[33] Exploring the historical context of a passage is an important exegetical step

because it is the context of communication that reveals its meaning. If the goal of exegesis is to

identify the author's original message, then understanding the historical context is necessary for

accurate interpretation.[34]

 Another exegetical term that needs clarification is "literary criticism." Many exegetical

approaches are titled "literary criticism." Such methods include genre analysis, the study of

literary context, discourse analysis, and rhetorical criticism.[35] Literary criticism's main focus is

on the text as a piece of literature over against its historical context and textual history.[36]

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[30]Klein *et al*, *Biblical Interpretation*, 179–183.

[31]Articles on "Geography of the Bible Lands," "Archeology and the New Testament," "Cultural Background of the New Testament," "Religious Background of the New Testament," and "Political Background of the New Testament" can be found in *Foundations for Biblical Interpretation: A Complete Library of Tools and Resources*, ed., David S. Dockery, Kenneth A. Matthews, and Robert B. Sloan. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994.

[32]Such as Robert M. Mulholland, "Sociological Criticism," In *Interpreting the New Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues*, ed. David Alan Black and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 170–186.

[33]Osborne includes economics, and military and war in his background study. Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 130–131.

[34]Klein *et al*, *Biblical Interpretation*, 172.

[35]Other disciplines are associated with the term "literary criticism" such as structuralism, deconstructionism, narrative criticism, reader-response, canon criticism, and formalism. These are not treated at length due to the limited nature of this paper. In addition, some are not exegetical steps, but hermeneutical perspectives, some of which do not agree with the presuppositions of this paper (see above).

[36]McKnight, *Synoptic Gospels*, 122–123.

Identifying the genre of a biblical book and passage gives the exegete the perspective necessary to approach the text properly.[37] The literary context of a passage includes the passage's immediate context, the book, the author's corpus, the testament context, and Bible context.[38]

The author's corpus, the testament context, and Bible context influence theological aspects of exegesis instead of literary aspects. This theological context constitutes a separate exegetical step called "theological analysis,"[39] which will be discussed in more detail later. The immediate and book contexts are the primary concerns of discourse analysis.[40] Tasks such as determining the units of the text,[41] tracing the argument through the relationships between units, and identifying the theme of the whole book all fit into discourse analysis. All this is vital for exegesis because "the intended meaning of any passage is the meaning that is consistent with the sense of the literary context in which it occurs."[42]

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[37]Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 149–151.

[38]Klein *et al*, *Biblical Interpretation*, 161.

[39]Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 131ff.

[40]George H. Guthrie, "Discourse Analysis," In *Interpreting the New Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues*, ed. David Alan Black and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 253–271.

[41]A discourse can be divided in many ways: by content only (the traditional outline approach), linguistically, through epistolary analysis, or through rhetorical analysis. Epistolary analysis is regarded as a part of genre analysis in this paper. There is a strong argument for the superiority of linguistic divisions over the others. Epistolary and rhetorical analyses should be based on units established by a study of the linguistic clues in the text. It may also be helpful to synthesize all these outlines on one diagram.

[42]Klein *et al*, *Biblical Interpretation*, 156.

Rhetorical analysis is a study of "stylistic method for getting across a message."[43] This occurs on three levels: the function of the book, the function of the units within the book, and the compositional techniques used within the units.[44] In the study of Greco-Roman rhetoric there were three major forms which describe the function of any discourse: judicial (arguments in a controversy), deliberative (exhortations for an issue), and epideictic (the praising or blaming of persons).[45] The units within the book can also have one of several rhetorical functions according to the basic elements of Greco-Roman rhetoric.[46] Rhetorical and stylistic devices are used within the units such as alliteration, antithesis, asyndeton, chiasmus, hyperbole, irony, metaphor, and paronomasia.[47]

Not only is the exegete to consider the historical and literary context of the passage, but he will also examine its details. Many scholars regard textual analysis, translation, lexical analysis, grammatical analysis, syntactical analysis, and structural analysis as the primary work of exegesis.[48] The exegete must establish the original reading according the principles and

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[43]Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 35.

[44]Ibid.

[45]See Craig Blomberg, "The Diversity of Literary Genres in the New Testament," In *Interpreting the New Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues*, ed. David Alan Black and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 281.

[46]The *exordium* (the statement of the cause), *narratio* (the background and facts of the case), *argumentatio* (the main argument), and *peroratio* (the summarization and final arguments). The *argumentatio* may also include a *propositio* (that which is or is not agreed upon), a *probatio* (proofs and logical arguments), or a *refutatio* (refutation of opponents' arguments). See Blomberg, "The Diversity of Literary Genres," 281.

[47]See David Alan Black, *Linguistics for Students of New Testament Greek: A Survey of Basic Concepts and Applications* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 132–136.

[48]McKnight, Synoptic Gospels, 51; Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 48; Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 146.

procedures of textual criticism and translate the text. Then, in order to discover the author's

original message it is vital that the exegete discern the meaning of the words in each particular

context.[49] The immediate context is comprised of the grammatical relationships within the text.

Some scholars divide grammar into morphology, "how words are inflected," and syntax, "the

system each language has for combining its various constituents in order to communicate."[50]

Others refer to grammar as "the basic laws of language behind the relationships between the

terms in the surface structure."[51] The second definition is not an exegetical step, but the

foundation of syntactical analysis. Although the division in the first definition appears legitimate,

all grammatical relationships can effectively be subsumed under the term "syntactical analysis."

Without examining the syntax of a passage, it is impossible to discovering the author's original

message.[52]

As the exegete examines the text, he should also consider what sources the author used

and how he utilized them. One major area of study in sources is the use of the Old Testament in

the New. In addition to this, there are several issues surrounding the synoptic gospels. These are

addressed in the exegetical step sometimes called "tradition analysis." Tradition analysis

explores the history of the text such as source, form, and redaction criticism.[53] The source critic

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[49]Klein *et al*, *Biblical Interpretation*, 183.

[50]Klein *et al*, *Biblical Interpretation*, 200. See also Fee, *New Testament Exegesis*, 92.

[51]Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 41. See also Furnish, "Practical Guidelines," 6.

[52]Klein *et al*, *Biblical Interpretation*, 199–201.

[53]See D. A.Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 21; and Black, *New Testament Greek*, 82–85.

seeks to identify sources that an author used; form criticism is the study of the oral

transmission of the sources; and the redaction critic analyzes how an author arranged and edited

his sources.[54]

Source criticism is the study of the literary interdependence of the synoptic gospels.

This is not actually an exegetical analysis of a text. One's solution to the synoptic problem will

influence his approach to the text, especially his use of redaction criticism.[55] As one reconstructs

the history of the oral transmission of the text, he is concerned with the "forms" and life settings

in which they were transmitted.[56] Since so much of form criticism is speculative, the only

contribution it makes to exegesis is the "forms" of the pericopes.[57] Carson, Moo, and Morris

conclude, "Form and source criticism, both of which, in their concern with prehistory of the

gospel tradition, are important for the historian of early Christianity but of only minimal help to

the interpreter."[58] Therefore, form criticism does not warrant an exegetical step of its own, but

one's genre analysis should be informed by form critical studies.

Finally, redaction criticism is valuable for its emphasis on the parallels in the synoptic

gospels. However, the weakness of redaction criticism is its dependence upon a solution to the

synoptic problem. McKnight acknowledges, "This discipline requires that one isolate sources

and redactional alterations. But we can never be absolutely certain

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[54]See Carson et al, *Introduction*, 21; and Black, *New Testament Greek*, 82.

[55]McKnight, *Synoptic Gospels*, 84.

[56]Ibid., 72.

[57]Ibid., 78–79.

[58]Carson et al, *Introduction*, 45.

about some of these matters since we can never be totally confident of a solution to the Synoptic Problem."[59] Therefore, the theological emphases one might find in a redaction study are of minimal value. One question may be offered for further investigation: Are there any theological emphases discovered in a redaction study that are not apparent in a careful study of the text on its own?

The last topic to discuss concerning exegetical methodology is theology. Does theology belong in the exegetical task? Most scholars seem to answer, "Yes!"[60] Furnish reasons, "New Testament exegesis is not complete if it does not deal also with the theology of the texts. This is so because, without notable exception, the New Testament writers themselves have an explicitly theological objective when writing."[61] The exegete should interpret the author's message in a particular passage in light of the theological themes and teachings found in the same book, the author's corpus, the New Testament, and the whole Bible.[62] The next step, determining the timeless truth principles in the text for application, moves into exposition toward contextualization.[63]

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[59]McKnight, *Synoptic Gospels*, 89. He gives a rejoinder, "When there is a near majority on the Markan hypothesis, many uncertainties can be removed." Ibid. He states this as if a majority agreement on an issue validates its truth value.

[60]See Dockery, "Study and Interpretation,"47; Haller, "Interpretive Task," 163–164; Furnish, "Practical Guidelines," 9; Silva, *Interpreting Galatians*, 141; Ralph P. Martin, "Approaches to New Testament Exegesis," In *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods*, ed. I. Howard Marshall (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 227–228.

[61]Furnish, "Practical Guidelines," 9.

[62]Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 131–146. He emphasizes "antecedent Scripture" as most important for theological analysis.

[63]See Table 1 above.

In light of this evaluation, the following list organizes the areas of study that are most useful for exegesis (not in sequential order):

Table 3. Useful Areas of Study for Exegesis

Historical Context
        Introduction issues
        Historical background
Literary Analysis
        Discourse Analysis
            Determine the units of the text
            Trace the argument (relationship of units)
            Identify the discourse theme
        Genre Analysis
        Rhetorical Analysis
Textual Analysis
Translation
Lexical Analysis
Syntactical Analysis
Structural Analysis
Cross References
        Use of OT in NT
        Gospel parallels
Theological Analysis

Proposed Order for an Exegetical Method

Once the exegete has chosen the necessary exegetical steps, he may now determine the most effective order in which to execute them. He will soon discover that these phases of exegesis are not easily divided. Furnish warns that they cannot be "hermetically separated one from another, or retained in a rigid chronological sequence."[64] Instead, "The steps in exegesis . . . are blended into a continuous flow of ever new transitions."[65] The problem becomes apparent

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[64]Furnish, "Practical Guidelines," 9. See also Malherbe, "The Task and Method," 173.

[65]Haller, "Interpretive Task," 164.

when one finds that a good outline of a book and its theme cannot really be established until

the details of the book are studied, and a thorough study of the details are not accurately

understood until a good outline of a book and its theme are established. Malherbe describes this

dynamic,

> Any analysis of a text should therefore be conscious of two aspects of any one element: (1) the peculiar meaning that it has as an isolated entity, i.e., the meaning that it will contribute to the whole, and (2) the conditioning that it undergoes as a part of the whole to which it contributes.[66]

There should be a constant movement, then, between analysis of the macrostructure and the

microstructure of a passage.[67] One's method should reflect this movement by not attempting to

carry out, for instance, all the historical analysis at one point in the process.

Many methodologies begin with the historical background.[68] Kaiser writes, "There is

an absolutely fundamental and essential work in background studies which must precede the in-

depth study of the selected passage."[69] Osborne explains that knowing the historical context will

"narrow down the interpretive laws so that we might ask the proper questions."[70] He warns that

these are preliminary conclusions that should direct, but not dictate, the study of the text.[71] Next,

the exegete should consider the literary context of his passage by conducting a preliminary

discourse analysis. This discourse analysis will include a determination of units according to

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[66]Malherbe, "The Task and Method," 173.

[67]See Guthrie, "Discourse Analysis," 260.

[68]See Walter L. Liefeld, *New Testament Exposition: From Text to Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 29; Fee, Osborne, Black, Dockery, and McKnight.

[69]Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 42.

[70]Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 21.

[71]Ibid.

linguistic devices, a structural diagram and summary of each unit, the tracing of the thought

development, and the identification of the discourse theme.

Before addressing the details of the text it will also be helpful to identify the genre of

the book and units (if applicable), and to do a rhetorical analysis of the book and the functions of

the units. When the exegete moves to a particular passage, establishing the text through a textual

analysis is normally executed first.[72] Then he may attempt to translate the text, but he will soon

find many translational decisions require lexical, grammatical, syntactical, and structural

analyses. "In a sense, translation can only proceed after all of the other tasks of exegesis have

been accomplished."[73] It is helpful at this point, however, to do a preliminary translation in order

to become familiar with the text and become aware of the lexical, grammatical, syntactical, and

structural issues.[74] Lexical analysis or semantics is the study of the meanings of the words that

appear in the text. Although this seems to be a logical first step, many lexical decisions are made

on other contextual issues that involve grammar, syntax, and structure. Referring to grammar,

semantics, and syntax, Osborne suggests, "The interpreter . . . will consider all three at the same

time when studying the surface structure (sentences) in order to delineate the original intended

meaning."[75] The exegete might begin with lexical analysis, answering syntactical questions as

necessary. Then, after conducting a more thorough syntactical analysis, he can diagram the

syntactical relationships.

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[72]See Otto Kaiser, and Werner G. Kummel, *Exegetical Method: A Student Handbook* (New York: Seabury, 1981) 45; Osborne, Furnish, Malherbe, Egger, Black, Silva, and McKnight.

[73]Furnish, "Practical Guidelines," 11.

[74]Kaiser suggests doing a preliminary translation as well. See Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 51.

[75]Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 41.

With the details of the passage at hand, the exegete can now return to rhetorical analysis by identifying the rhetorical devices used by the author within the unit. A common rhetorical strategy of the New Testament is to use the Old Testament as a source. These, as well as other cross references (such as gospel parallels) should be noted at this point in the exegetical process. All through the previous steps, the Bible student will have encountered aspects of the passage that would be made clearer by further historical research. As he does more historical analysis, he may also return to and evaluate his previous historical analysis for accuracy in light of his exegetical work.

It is now time for the exegete to step back from the details of the text and identify the theological themes he has uncovered. A theological analysis includes the identification of the themes of the passage and the main theme of the passage, and interpretation of the author's message in light of the use of these themes within the same book, within the author's corpus, within antecedent Scripture, and within the whole Bible. Now all of this work can be expressed in an accurate and polished final translation as well as a paraphrase which more fully captures the passage's sense. Finally, the Bible student can compare his own findings with the preliminary historical and discourse analyses with which he started and make the necessary adjustments.

Table 4. An Exegetical Method in Logical Sequence

Historical Analysis: Introductory Matters and Background
Preliminary Discourse Analysis
        Determination of Units
        Structural Diagrams
        Summarize Units
        Trace flow of thought
        Name Discourse Theme
Genre Analysis: Book and Units
Rhetorical Analysis
        Book
        Function of Units
Textual Analysis
Preliminary Translation
Lexical Analysis
Syntactical Analysis
Structural Analysis: Revise Structural Diagram
Rhetorical Analysis within Units
Cross References:
        Use of OT in NT
        Gospel Parallels
Historical Background in Light of Text
Reevaluation Historical Context
Theological Analysis
Final Translation and Paraphrase
Reevaluate Discourse Analysis

The Linguistic-Historical Method?

As was expressed in the presuppositions, the perspective of this methodology is in sympathy with the grammatico-historical method. However, as Kaiser argues, this name "fails to go far enough in describing the main job of exegesis."[76] He suggests the "syntactical–theological exegesis" as a better description.[77] "Syntactical" is a better description than "grammatical," but

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[76]Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 89.

[77]Ibid., 88.

does it go far enough? There are still many steps that are not being described. His emphasis on the importance of theology is also well noted, but does its position in the exegetical method warrant a place in the name?

The term "linguistics" seems to cover a greater number of exegetical steps than either "syntactical" or "theological." Silva states, "It would be only a mild exaggeration to say that interpretation is all about language."[78] According to Black linguistics includes grammar, syntax, semantics, and discourse analysis.[79] Max Turner also includes these as well as structure analysis.[80] In addition, Kummel places translation and lexical analyses under the heading "linguistics."[81] Osborne suggests, "Exegesis proper could be subdivided into linguistic and cultural aspects."[82] "Historical" instead of "cultural" would be a more inclusive term. Therefore, it seems that "linguistic-historical exegesis" is the best name to describe this methodology. "Theology" is not in the title because, as table 1 and 3 demonstrate, it is not the dominant approach, but only a small fraction of the exegetical method.

"Linguistic" should be placed before "historical" for two reasons. First, the linguistics describes the majority of exegetical steps.

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[78]Silva, *Interpreting Galatians*, 41.

[79]Black, *Linguistics*, 53–197.

[80]Max Turner, "Modern Linguistics and the New Testament," In *Hearing the New Testament*, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 146.

[81]Kummel, *Exegetical Method*, 46–47.

[82]Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 41.

Table 5. Linguistic-historical Exegesis

LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS	HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

Preliminary Discourse Analysis
    Determination of Units
    Structural Diagrams
    Summarize Units
    Trace flow of thought
    Name Discourse Theme
Genre Analysis: Book and Units
Rhetorical Analysis
    Book
    Function of Units
Preliminary Translation
Lexical Analysis
Syntactical Analysis
Structural Analysis: Revise Structural Diagram
Rhetorical Analysis in Units
Final Translation and Paraphrase
Reevaluate Discourse Analysis
	Historical Analysis:
	    Introductory Matters
	    Background
	Textual Analysis[83]
	Historical Background in Light of Text
	Reevaluation Historical Context

Second, those issues dealing with language and the text are more important. Osborne argues, "The text is primary and not background material."[84] Many scholars claim with McKnight that "Grammar and Syntax constitute the essence of exegesis."[85] The language of the text is where the actual message is found, the historical context is used only to help the exegete understand the message. If the exegete can discover the intention of the original writer, he can then find the timeless truths of God for today and apply them to his life. Therefore, along with Schreiner, "I

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[83]Textual Criticism could also be categorized under "linguistic analysis." Silva writes, "Textual transmission may be regarded as a form of linguistic communication." Silva, *Interpreting Galatians*, 41.

[84]Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 146. See also Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 48.

[85]McKnight, *Interpreting the Synoptic Gospels*, 51. See also Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 48; Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 146.

have often wondered why biblical exegesis is not the consuming passion of pastors and

students."[86]

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[86]Schreiner, *Pauline Epistles*, 16.