

# EXEGETICAL WORKING PAPER

An Exegetical Working Paper or text analysis is a brief summary of the critical issues found in a particular pericope. It is a working paper, not a final judgment in which all exegetical issues are resolved. Its goal is to pose questions that will lead to a close and careful reading of the text and provide boundaries for interpretation. Footnote all sources used.

Before you begin, encounter God through *Lectio Divina*. Expect to hear a word from God that leads to communal transformation into the image of Christ. You cannot bear witness to that which you have not witnessed. Four traditional moves of *Lectio Divina* are read (*lectio*), reflect (*meditatio*), respond (*oratio*), and rest (contemplation). Adding preparation (*silencio*) prior to your engagement of the text and resolve (*incarnatio*) at the conclusion of your practice will enhance your experience.

## 1) Introduction

- a) List your initial impressions of text, paraphrase the text in your own words, and list first impressions of the significance of the text then & now. How do people often respond to this text?

## 2) Outline of Text

- a) Your outline should give a brief schematic view of the structure of the passage. It should not be a verse-by-verse paraphrase of the passage but reflect the rhetorical and literary moves of the text. For preaching, outlining the movement of the text or the argument of the text often pre-figures the moves of the sermon when using the mode of immediacy.
- b) Formal structures: does the text manifest formal patterns (such as repetition, reversal, chiasm, theme and variations)? See Gordon F. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis*, rev. ed., 65-80; Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis* 2d ed., 78ff.<sup>1</sup>
- c) Rhetorical or Logical structure: What is the line of argument in the text? Is the text organized according to a particular convention of ancient rhetoric? [See Fee, 42-43, 175-177.]
- d) Narrative Structure: Are there multiple scenes? Different groupings of characters? Is there an identifiable climax and denouement? Does the text belong to a typical literary form with standard formal characteristics? [See Fee, 48, 177-78; Stuart, 17-20, 49-51.]
- e) Note who is speaking and to whom. Is there a shift in voice? What is the setting? Is there some sort of structure (rhetorical, literary, formal, poetic) to the passage? Are there any disjunctions (narrative, logical, dramatic)?

## 3) Key Exegetical Issues.

### a) Boundaries and placement of the pericope.

- i) Where does the passage begin and end? Why there rather than somewhere else? Would different partitioning of the text affect its interpretation? [See Fee, 35-36, 148-49; Stuart, 12-13, 45-47.] Does it belong to a wider grouping of materials? If so, is its placement within this grouping significant? What role does the passage play in the development of the narrative or argument? [See Fee, 44-45, 147-48; Stuart, 34-40.]
- ii) Does the passage reflect characteristic themes and emphases of the writer?

### b) Textual Problems.

- i) Do some ancient Greek manuscripts provide significant variant readings? How are the variants to be explained? What do they tell us about the earliest interpretation of the text? What is the probable original reading? [See Fee, 40-41, 81-91, 169-70; Stuart, 34-40.]
- ii) Examine Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the New Testament*.

### c) Issues of Translation.

- i) Translate text yourself if you are able.

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<sup>1</sup> See also Michael J. Gorman, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis: A Basic Guide for Students and Ministers*, rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009).

- ii) Compare English translations to see if there are any major differences in the form, tone, meaning and/or sense of the passage. Do translators agree on poetic reconstructions? Are the verbs rendered into English the same tense? Are there any textual footnotes in your Bible identifying a textual problem? Are there ambiguities or syntactical difficulties in the text? [See Fee, 149-50; Stuart, 51-58.]
- d) Analysis of Key Words.**
  - i) Using Bauer's *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, and Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, and a concordance such as Morrison's *Analytical Concordance*, investigate the meanings of important words in the passage.
  - ii) For OT word studies see, Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*; Botterwech, Ringgren, and Fabry, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. [See Fee, 100-13.] Are any of the terms used in the passage thematic keys to interpretation? Which ones? Why so?
- e) Form-Critical Issues.**
  - i) Does the text belong to a typical literary form with standard formal characteristics? [See Fee, 48, 177-78; Stuart, 13-17, 47-49.] If so, does this provide insight into the meaning of the passage? Has the author in some way significantly modified the standard form (e.g., miracle story or pronouncement story)? How do genre considerations influence the function of the text?
  - ii) How do the literary and rhetorical features of the text accomplish its function? The question of image, argument, metaphor, narrative, etc.
- f) Relation to other texts. Canonical Issues.**
  - i) The question of inter/intra- textuality. Are there themes and motifs here that occur elsewhere within the canon, or is the passage distinctive within the canon?
  - ii) Does it express a theological perspective that might be illuminated by—or stand in tension with—other texts? [See Fee, 54-55, 160; Stuart, 23-24, 144-148.]
- g) Use of Tradition or Sources.**
  - i) Does the passage quote from other sources (e.g., OT)? Does the writer employ traditional material from other early Christian sources (confessional or liturgical formulae, hymns, catechetical traditions)? A special instance of the source question is the problem of the literary relationship among the gospels: has one of the evangelists used another as a literary source? [See Fee, 139-43.]
  - ii) Where traditional materials are used, how are they used and for what purposes? How are they modified and why?
- h) Historical Issues.**
  - i) Does the text narrate events “as they really happened,” or must the historian reconstruct a different account of the history behind the text? [See Fee, 50-51; Stuart, 9-12.]
  - ii) Historical and Cultural: Does the passage reflect images, motifs, or ways of thinking that must be understood against the background of Jewish or Greco-Roman culture, religion and philosophy? [See Fee, 114-23, 173-75; Stuart, 107-118.] Commentaries will often provide helpful insight on such matters.
  - iii) How does the text illumine the history and characteristics of the community within which it was produced and used? How has the historical context shaped the text?
- i) Tradition.**
  - i) How has the church used this text throughout the centuries? History of Interpretation.
  - ii) How has this text shaped the church through the centuries?
- j) Narrativial Consideration.**
  - i) For narrative texts, ask again the canonical question, “How does the narrative fit into the larger narrative of God’s story?”
  - ii) For non-narrative texts, there are three levels of narrativial sub-structures:
    - (1) The narrative of the author(s).
    - (2) The narrative of the first recipients (the occasion of the writing).
    - (3) The larger narrative frame of God’s ongoing story.
- k) Function of passage in context. Theological Interpretation.**

- i) Literary/Rhetorical: How is the passage related to what comes before it and to what follows it? How does it help to pull the narrative along, or develop the argument? What tensions (theological, historical, dramatic) does it set up or resolve?
- ii) Theological: What is the primary theological move of the passage? What theology informs the text's function and intent? What theology emerges from the teaching of the text? For example, a text may say something about reconciliation. However, go beyond the content of subject being discussed and ask how that content functions to achieve larger literary/rhetorical/theological ends.

#### **4) Significance of the Passage Then & Now: The Concerns of the Text**

- a) Here you may reflect more broadly upon the theological and ethical issues raised by the text for contemporary interpretation and application. [See Fee, 161-62; Stuart, 28-31.]
- b) What understanding of God, Jesus, the church, human existence and/or the world is presented in the passage?
- c) What would it mean for the community of faith to treat this passage as normative for our life and witness? What world does this text create? What practices, habits, virtues emerge from the lives of folks who take this text seriously?
- d) At what points do you agree or disagree with the passage? Why? How do you propose to deal with your differences?
- e) What works of literature, art, or music might be read in counterpoint with this passage in order to bring its message into perspective?
- f) What current events might be read in counterpoint with this passage in order to bring its message into perspective?
- g) Compare and contrast present understanding of the text with the introductory section of the Exegetical Working Paper. Does the text support or challenge those first impressions of reader response?

#### **5) Sermon Considerations**

- a) What are the concerns of the congregation? Do any of the theological concerns of the text connect with the concerns of the people? Consider transcendence, community, and significance—three universal needs of people.
- b) What are some possible sermon trajectories? What are some potential images? What are some doable ways to make the function of the sermon concrete in the lives of people?
- c) Write sermon focus and function statements. The focus statement should be theologically grounded and the function statement should be behaviorally or affectively viable.
- d) Write a conclusion that coheres with the focus and function statements.
- e) Begin to design a sermon. Keep the theology of the text in the present tense.
- f) Write an introduction that begins with the people listening.

#### **6) Discussion Questions.**

- a) List at least 3 key questions that lead to further investigation

#### **7) Other Articles.**

- a) List at least three key journal resources not used in writing this paper.
- b) Provide a 100 word abstract of the three articles.