

Exegesis Booklet



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Part 1:

Introduction

Chapter 1

The Bible and how we listen to God through His word.

As Christians one of our most important encounters is with the Bible – that collection of writings we describe as ‘Scripture’ or ‘the word of God’.

Understanding the message embedded in the Old and New Testament is essential to the spiritual vitality of the believer and the church.

‘It lies behind what we believe, how we live, how we get on together, and what we have to offer to the world’ (Erkel 1999).

So it is vital that we know how to make the best use of this essential resource: how to read it wisely, intelligently, critically, faithfully, and expectantly – and how to let it speak to us as stories about God, and God’s story about us.

Reading the Bible

We are so used to seeing the Bible as a single book that we forget that, for most of its history, it was a collection of separate scrolls or manuscripts – and that, for quite a lot of that time, there wasn’t total agreement about which of them should be regarded as ‘holy scripture’.¹

Also, because we usually hear it read in small bits on Sundays, or read short extracts in our personal devotions, we lose sight of what is sometimes called ‘the grand narrative’ of the Bible: that is, the overarching story it tells through a diverse collection of stories.

So the question arises: how do we (or should we) read the Bible? This is not a question about how often we should read it, or how much of it at a time, but

¹ The canon of the Jewish Bible was not finalised until around 100 CE – that is, in the late New Testament period. The canon of the New Testament itself was not decided until 367 CE – more than 300 years after the time of Jesus (Borg 2001: 28-29).

rather: How can we best approach the Bible so that we hear God's story afresh?

Dual Authorship

Wright and Lamb (2009) offer guidelines that some might find helpful. One of the first points they make in the introduction to their book is that the Bible has a 'dual authorship'. Just as we affirm that Jesus was fully human and fully divine (not partly human and partly divine), so we can affirm that the Bible is not 'partly' the word of God and 'partly' the words of human authors, but is *wholly both* (Wright and Lamb 2009: 3-4).

Wright and Lamb look at the Bible *as the word of God* in terms of its inspiration, truth, unity, clarity, and authority (2009: 8-20), after which they examine it *as the words of human authors* in terms of the *context* (literary, historical, social, and editorial), and the *text itself* (through careful analysis of its structure and form, and its use of images, metaphors and word-pictures) (2009: 21-35). Then they invite us to understand it *as a whole* (2009: 36-53). Here they discuss the overall unity of the Bible, and suggest some frameworks for understanding its 'grand narrative' (the overarching story it tells):

- One framework for the 'grand narrative' is that it moves from *creation* (in Genesis) to *new creation* (in Revelation), with all that happens between those two events forming the story of God's dealings with humanity.
- A second 'grand narrative' framework is that the Bible sets out a sequence of *covenants*: from Noah through Abraham, Moses, and David to the new covenant in Christ.
- A third approach to the 'grand narrative' is to see it as setting out *God's missional goal* to bring about the redemption and restoration of all creation. God's mission begins with the act of creation itself and the *many nations* that arise, according to Genesis; it is given to *one nation* (Israel) to carry out; it is then focused on *one person* (Jesus) when Israel fails to do so, resulting in a new reality, the people of God (the Church) from *all nations* in the visions of Revelation.

All of those frameworks are true to the Bible – they simply reflect different perspectives that we bring to it, or different angles from which we look at it.

Interpreting Scripture Responsibly

Every reading of scripture is an interpretation from the perspective of the one who is interpreting. What, then, makes for good interpretation? How can we distinguish between good and bad interpretations? How can we make sure that we are interpreting a section of text responsibly? This is important because we tend to read and work with a small section of the whole.

Let's outline a few important steps that will guide us in interpreting the Bible responsibly, followed by an overview of the tools we need to use.

1. Read a passage in its biblical context

If we want to understand an individual verse or a passage, we first need to understand it in the context of the message of the book that it is in. For example, if I want to understand what Paul meant by "the fruit of the Spirit" in Galatians 5:22, I need to understand how it fits into the themes and message of the letter to the Galatians. I therefore need to ask, "How does the passage about the fruit of the spirit relate to the message of Galatians?"

So before we try to interpret a passage of scripture, we need to ask:

- What book of the Bible does this passage come from?
- What is the message of this specific book of the Bible?
- What comes just before the verse(s) I am trying to interpret? What comes after the verses I am trying to interpret? How do the verses and chapters before and after the passage I am reading help me to understand the verses I am looking at?

To answer these questions, we need to understand the history and culture in which it was written. This takes us to the next point:

2. Read the passage in its historical and cultural context

If we want to understand and interpret the meaning of a passage of scripture, not only do we need to understand how it fits in with the message of the specific book it is in, we also need to understand it in its historical context. In order to do this we need to ask a few important questions:

- What was the culture of the author?
- What was the historical background of the passage or the time at which it was written?

- What was the author's intention when it was written?
- How would the original hearers, from within their own cultural and historical context, have understood the message of the book? And how would they have understood the meaning of those verses against the meaning of the rest of the book?

3. Recognise the gap between then and now

There is a significant gap between the history and culture at the time the text was written and our own historical and cultural context. Reading the Bible is a form of cross-cultural communication. When two people from different cultures communicate, there is always a danger of miscommunication. That can (and does) happen between the biblical authors and us.

For example: in Jesus' day, if a man asked a woman for a drink of water (John 4:7), it was seen as scandalous as it broke with the social convention of that time, especially between Jews and Samaritans – as serious, as we might view someone today having an extramarital affair. But in the South African urban culture, there is nothing odd about a man asking a woman for water. Different cultures give different meanings to different actions.

When we try to apply the meaning of a text to our life today, we need to cross a bridge from the ancient culture(s) of the biblical era to our own culture(s). This is not always easy. Often what we need to do is uncover the author(s)' intention to find the underlying principle of a passage, and then explore how we can apply that principle to our living today.

4. Identify the style of writing (or genre) of the passage

Apart from the history and culture behind a passage, we also need to ask what *kind* of writing it is, or style/genre. When a person writes something, they choose to write it in a particular way, and they impose this form (style/genre) onto the content of what they are seeking to communicate. There are many different genres in the Bible, including:

- Poetry
- Narratives
- Laws
- History

- Myth
- Prophecy
- Letters
- Psalms / hymns
- Parables

For example, if we read Jonah – a book written as a parable – as literal history, we completely misinterpret it. The various styles/genres are significantly different from one another even if they appear to overlap: parable from history, poetry from prophecy, letters from narratives, and so on. If we do not understand the style/genre of the book we are reading, then we are likely to misinterpret the meaning of the passage.

5. Read the passage in the context of the overarching message of the Bible

To interpret a passage from the Bible responsibly, we need to understand it against the overarching meaning of the Bible as a whole – what we earlier called its ‘grand narrative’. We need, therefore, to ask the following questions:

- How does this passage fit into the flow of the whole story of the Bible?
- Are there other passages on a similar theme that help us to understand this passage?
- Are there other passages that might help to contrast or clarify the meaning of this passage?

In addition, a New Testament writer will often use a phrase or idea from the Old Testament. In such cases, it is important to find the appropriate passage in the Hebrew Bible, because it might help us to know more clearly what the New Testament writer’s intention is.

6. Find out how the Christian community interprets the passage

To interpret Scripture responsibly, we need to listen carefully to the voices of other Christians throughout history and in our own time. We need to read and interpret the Bible *in community*, which will include:

- People from our own church tradition
- People from other church traditions
- Biblical scholars and commentators from the past and the present.

Listening to the voices and opinions of others does not mean that we have to agree with everything they say. But hearing an alternative point of view can help us to be more critical of our own point of view. Nobody has the whole truth; we all see truth in a partial way (see 1 Corinthians 13:9-10). Listening to the voices of other disciples we know, reading Bible commentaries, and finding out how Christians have interpreted a passage in the past can often help to deepen and broaden our appreciation and understanding of the biblical message.

Religious cults often grow up where people adopt a narrow or isolated view of biblical passages. Those who think they are the only ones who know how to interpret a passage properly, are usually unwilling to have their views tested against the wisdom of other followers of Jesus. Such cultic practices, based on flawed interpretation of biblical passages, have had devastating and fatal consequences for their followers.

7. Read the passage in the light of what we know about God in Jesus

If we want to know what God is like, we need to look to Jesus. So any interpretation and application of scripture needs to be weighed against what we know about God in Jesus. The important question in biblical interpretation is, “Does this interpretation of scripture reflect the values, the character, the life and ministry of Jesus?” Does it reflect God’s grace and love as seen in Jesus?

To put it another way: Would Jesus say “Amen!” to our interpretation of scripture? Does our interpretation ring true to who Jesus was (and is), how Jesus treated people, and what Jesus valued? If not, we need to go back to the text and look again at how we are interpreting its message and applying the biblical passage. For example: If I read about King Saul taking revenge on his enemies, and I am led to think that I too can take revenge on my enemies, then my interpretation is not in line with the example of Jesus: he did not teach revenge, but non-violent resistance and forgiveness.

What might it mean for us today?

If we simply read the Bible like an ordinary book, then we are treating it like an historical piece of literature. Christians want to go further and ask the question,

“What does it mean for us today?” But we can only ask that question once we have followed the steps above.

This is a challenging process. Not only does it require us to know the historical background of the passage: we also need to know our own world today and the communities in which we live, with its struggles, difficulties, and issues. That’s the basis for dialogue between the text and us.

It is vital that interpreting a passage of scripture be done in a prayerful way. This means that we always seek to listen to the Spirit of Christ working in our thoughts and our hearts. The interpretation of Scripture is not just something we do as an academic exercise: it also involves the heart. We need to listen for God’s Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, speaking to us. The Spirit of God puts us in contact not just with the words on the page, but also in contact with the living Word of God, the Risen Jesus.

Chapter 2

What is Exegesis?

Interpreting the Bible is one of the central issues facing Christians today. It is not surprising therefore, that Christians through the centuries have sought to develop and follow sound principles of biblical interpretation. “After all”, as Corley (2002: xv) says “people committed to living under the authority of Scripture want to be sure that they grasp its teaching accurately”.

One of the first steps to correctly interpreting Scripture appropriately is being aware the Bible, like most Holy texts, speaks about its origins and authority. This cautions us about imposing our own meaning onto it.

Exegesis refers to the practice, procedures and methods one uses to understand the text (Osborne 1991:5). The goal of the exegetical process is to reach an informed understanding of the text based on an encounter with the text (Hayes and Halladay 2007:23). We use the term 'understanding' verses 'establishing the meaning of the text' as we will never fully understand the text - exegesis is an on-going process.

Exegesis can be seen as a process of asking questions of the text which arise from both one's own reading of the text and from the specific tools one employs. These questions enable the reader to explore the passage in its many facets (Wallace 2013: np).

Having said that, exegesis is not simply answering a set of questions; for an exegesis is not complete until all the information that has been extracted is brought together into a coherent understanding of what the passage is about. Then in order to complete his/her work, an exegete (the person doing the exegesis) must move from interpretation to application; addressing the contemporary significance of the passage. Thus allowing the interpreted text

to be the means through which God speaks to men and women today. The ultimate goal of the interpretation of Scripture is to discern the normative truth of God for today so that it can be applied to daily living (McDill 2014: 4).

Exegesis is therefore a complex process by which we investigate the text to better understand what it is we are reading and to bring out the spiritual riches of the text in order to apply them and use them in our everyday life.

Some factors that complicate biblical exegesis:

- The Bible has many authors, rather than just one. This means that the biblical writers had varied views and different intentions when they wrote.
- There's a huge time and cultural gap between us and the original readers of the Bible. Beliefs, traditions, ideas, and customs that were clear to them maybe confusing or ambiguous to us.
- The original biblical documents were written in a language different from ours. While a translation can be very close to the original, it can never completely reflect exactly what the original said. This makes the exegetical task more difficult.
- We weren't among those who received the original text. Paul, for example, wasn't thinking of us when he wrote to the Galatians. If we hope accurately to understand what Paul was saying to the Galatian believers, we have to find out something about both Paul and the Christians in Galatia.

Consider statements such as:

'Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat'(1Cor 8:14), and 'Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience' (1 Cor 10:25).

Does 1 Corinthians 8:14 mean we shouldn't eat meat today? Or does 1 Corinthians 10:25 allow us to eat meat, as long as it's bought in a meat market? What's a meat market in our context? Does a supermarket qualify as one?

Unless we've got some idea of the religious practices of pagan Corinth, we'll not only struggle to understand what Paul is saying, but we'll also struggle to apply it to modern life. The Old and New Testaments are full of customs, laws, views, beliefs and social structures that require careful analysis and reflection before we thoughtlessly apply them to modern living. Sometimes we find literature written fifty or hundred years ago difficult to understand because times have changed so much. Understanding the Bible can be far more difficult, because the writing is so much older, and the people of the time lived in a vastly different world from our own.

Exegesis needs to be contrasted with **Eisegesis**, the process of reading into the text a meaning that was not really there, so that we get it to say what we have already decided it should say. In Exegesis, before we try and understand what a text means for us today, we first need to allow the text to 'speak for itself.' first understanding what it meant when it was written, and then asking what it means for us now!

When we take in new information, we try to relate it to whatever we already know and understand. We don't easily take in - and are less likely to remember - information and experiences that don't fit our understanding. When approaching Scripture we more easily respond to, remember, and apply passages that fit with our existing beliefs and attitudes. We tend to overlook passages we don't easily understand and so can miss being challenged and stretched by the biblical message.

When we uncritically impose our own ideas, beliefs and theories on the text, we're doing eisegesis, not exegesis!

The following is an example of how our theology can radically influence the way we interpret a text.

We read in John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (NIV).

How we translate what is meant by the phrase 'the world' could depend on our theology. For example Calvinists (those who accept Calvin's theology) limit the meaning to those whom God has sovereignty called or 'elected' to salvation. They point to passages such as John 6:37-40 to justify this standpoint. Whereas Arminians (followers of Arminius' theological views) interpret 'the world' to mean all who of their own free decision, respond in faith to the gospel. They find support for their belief in verses such as John 1:4,7,9 and 15:1-5 (Osborne 1991: 376).

There are many other factors that influence us, such as our personality, experiences, education, value system, theology, environment and culture (Klein et al 1993:743).

When we read a text we do not quietly listen to all that the author is trying to say. Rather we dialogue with the author, reading what was written and then filtering and interpreting the text based on our own underlying **presuppositions** (Harris 2006:np).

Presuppositions form 'lenses' through which our view is filtered. Often these factors are so deep in our subconscious, that we don't realise the influence they have on us.

Presuppositions: are our basic beliefs that we use to build and evaluate all others beliefs. This means that it is impossible for us to separate ourselves from our past experiences, our own thoughts, beliefs, and feelings, or our knowledge of God. All human beings read their own beliefs into the text, no matter what kind of text it is.

Therefore, it is essential to have an understanding of the different 'lenses' we bring to the text. The more we become aware what our presuppositions are, the better we'll be able to do exegesis.

Since these presuppositions influence our exegesis, we should state them openly for the more light we can throw on our presuppositions the better our chance of eliminating our own bias when exploring the meaning of a particular text (Karleen 1989:125). It is important to be aware that all aspects of our lives affect what we are likely to 'see' easily in any given text. For example, if I were in poor health, perhaps I would pay particular attention to the healing miracles in the gospels.

If I am reasonably well off, how much do I notice the passages of Scripture that direct me to care for the poor?

Who I am as the reader also influences my prejudices. As a female, do I really understand what men experience in South Africa? Similarly, although I may try to understand the experience of homelessness, can I really appreciate what it means to be homeless? What disadvantaged people have to go through, how much more to be homeless? How much more careful do I need to be in trying to understand how a passage of Scripture may apply to someone who is sickly, or male, or homeless?

Therefore, we must try to be as objective as is humanly possible and not unconsciously read into the text our own values and beliefs in a way that stifles the text so that we can never hear the biblical message that speaks into and challenges our lives (Wallace 2013:np).

Chapter 3

Approaches to Exegesis

Over the past two centuries, biblical scholars have developed different approaches to understanding and interpreting Scripture. As exegetes, we have many exegetical methods available to us. This variety of methods not only shows the richness and diversity of biblical documents (Hayes and Holladay 2007:25) but reminds us that there is no one 'right' way.

Exegetical methods are also called 'critical tools' – not because they 'criticise' but because they are of vitally important to working with the text

In analysing biblical texts scholars have concentrated on three aspects of the text – its author, the text itself, and its readers (Hartin and Petzer 1991:1). Each approach focusses on a "specific centre of authority" (Porter 1995:87); the place where we start with our investigation.

1. Author-centred: also known as **behind the text** or the **diachronic approach** (meaning "across time")². This approach, which was the method of choice by most scholars in the twentieth century, pays attention to the historical and literary processes that produced the original text (Becker 2007:133). Here we look at the background and contextual influences that caused the text to be produced in its final form. This approach also seeks to discover as much as possible about the world of the author, the assumption being that no text is generated in a vacuum, but is a product of the author's world. The writing will thus reflect the political, historical, social, economic, religious and cultural context of the author (Tate 1991:175).

The main concern of this approach is to try and reconstruct the historical period in which the text was produced, as well as the society that produced the text.

The methods/critical tools of exegesis for the diachronic approach include the following:

² The Diachronic (from Greek δια- "through" and χρόνος "time") approach studies the development and evolution of a text through history (Bastes 2002).

- Textual criticism,
- Form criticism,
- Tradition criticism,
- Source criticism,
- Redaction criticism,
- Historical criticism.

2. Text-centered: also known as **within the text** or the **synchronic approach**³. This approach concentrates on what the text itself is saying, focussing on the literary and narrative content of the story. This includes focussing on the different types of literature or writings (style/genre) and the various internal relationships within the text (West 1993:21). According to scholars who support this approach, the meaning of the text lies in understanding the written text itself, not in understanding the author, the writing process, or the historical context in which the text first arose (McEntire 2013: np).

The methods used are primarily concerned with interpreting the final form of the text, and are “typically literary in nature; focusing on language, composition, narrative structure and capacity for persuasion” (Just 2006: np). Synchronic methods/critical tools of exegesis include the following:

- Literary criticism,
- Narrative criticism,
- Grammatical criticism,
- Rhetorical criticism.

3. Reader-centered: also known as **in front of the text** or the **existential approach**⁴. According to Scholars who support this approach the text has no power to communicate its meaning without the presence of a reader (Tate 1991:205). It is only when a person reads a text that it has meaning for that person in that place at that time. Different people in different places in different eras all reading the story of the Prodigal Son might have different insights and conclusions which are all valid interpretations of the parable.

³ Synchronic (from Greek συν- "together" and χρόνος "time") approach “opens the way to the meaning of the text by showing the structures present in the text itself” (Bastes 2002).

⁴ Existential approach asks what would the ancient author have meant by his words if he had been living in our contemporary situation and how does he speak to us today (Martin 1997:223)?

These scholars are primarily interested not in the text itself but in the text as something to be engaged; focusing on the result of the act of reading (Gorman 2009:18). The focus here is on the world of the reader, which is determined by their dominant questions, needs and interests (eg. What does the Bible say to nuclear power or genetic engineering?) When the reader fuses their modern world with the ancient world of the text, through dialogue with the text, the reader and the text are transformed through the new understanding (West 1993:44).

This approach reads the Bible in its thematic and symbolic context; focussing on major themes and symbols in the Bible as a whole (West 1993:22). Readers who approach the text in this way use diverse methods, and have a wide variety of goals or agendas (Gorman 2009:239).

Existential readings start with a 'lens' such as focus on transformation, or theology, such as liberation theology, African hermeneutics, postcolonial criticism, and missional interpretation. The goal of these methods may be described as something general (such as transformation or spiritual formation) or as something more specific (such as liberation or an encounter with God; Gorman 2009:20).

The advantage of the many methods which have arisen is that they bring many different areas of human understanding to the biblical text. We don't choose between the tools and methods but rather we select and use those that are appropriate for the passage being investigated. Methods should be seen as complementary, as each deals with a particular facet of a passage. The value should be seen in the combined effort of all of these approaches to continue to reveal ongoing meaning in the Bible.

Our approach to exegesis at TEEC is a simple exegetical model that asks relevant historical, literary and theological questions of the text to reach an informed understanding of the text (Hayes and Holladay 2007:23). It is an integrated approach that draws on the insights and methods of all three approaches, but in particular on the synchronic and diachronic approaches, emphasizing the importance of both the historical and literary contexts.

Since biblical writings belong to a world radically different from our own, our exegesis needs to seek an interpretation of a text which will make sense of everything in that text, both on its own and in its context. This context includes

both the historical environment of the biblical text, and also the literary environment of the work in which it occurs (Marshall 1997:15) Since a text is the product of an author, and the author is a product of a specific time in history, knowledge of the 'world behind the text' illuminates the 'world within the text'. A primary goal in placing a passage in its historic/cultural contexts is to understand the ways people thought and behaved in ancient times, so that we can understand a text's original meaning. Knowing when a "horse" is just a "horse" and not, say, a metaphor for some dark apocalyptic event (eg. the horsemen of the apocalypse in the Book of Revelation), helps us to accurately discern the original meaning of the text. In addition, while the bible may be part of God's revelation and self-disclosure to humanity, it is a revelation expressed in human language (Tate 2002:10, 67).

The use of just one method will result in a lopsided interpretation of the biblical text (Bastes 2002) whereas a full understanding of a biblical text can be achieved if we apply both synchronic and diachronic analysis. Once the reader is competent in these first tools then the tools in the existential approach become an exciting opportunity for advanced biblical study.

Part 2:

Critical Tools used in Exegesis

Chapter 4

Textual Criticism

Textual Criticism is the oldest form of Biblical Criticism. From very early on Christian Theologians were aware that different manuscripts of the same letters and books in the Bible had variations. These variations crept in because each of the manuscripts was copied by hand. Sometimes the copier may have simply made an accidental mistake. Sometimes the copier deliberately made a slight change in order to clarify what he/she thought the real meaning of the passage was.

As early copies were further copied by others they then duplicated these changes and even introduced further changes – either accidentally or deliberately. So there are many ‘versions’ of ancient manuscripts and it is possible to work out which were used to make the next copies.

For example, the *New Revised Standard Version* has several footnotes linked to chapter 53 of Isaiah.

Sometimes a Bible translation gives an alternative reading for a verse or word. For example Isaiah 53:3

Isa 53:3: <i>A man of suffering</i>
Footnote: Or ‘a man of sorrows’

[In other words either some manuscripts have a word meaning sorrow rather than the word suffering, or the original Hebrew word could be translated with both possible meanings].

We find the same thing in the New Testament.

Lk 11:2: <i>Your kingdom come</i>
Footnote: A few ancient authorities read ‘Your Holy Spirit come upon us and cleanse us’
Mk 14:8: <i>...and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.</i>
Footnote: <i>Some of the most ancient authorities bring the book to a close at the end of verse 8. One authority concludes the book with a shorter ending; others include the shorter ending and then continue with verses 9-20. In most authorities verses 9-20 follow immediately after verse 8, though in some of these authorities the passage is marked as being doubtful.</i>

Textual Criticism is therefore the study of what these differences are in the original manuscripts as well as the study of why some of these differences occurred. It is important for modern readers to be aware that not all of the original manuscripts are exactly the same. Mostly however the differences are small differences, but sometimes even a small difference can change the meaning of a word or passage!

When scholars compare different versions of the earliest Greek manuscripts of Mark’s Gospel, they discover that some of the manuscripts have the words ‘the Son of God’ included in verse one, and other manuscripts leave those words out. It means that, in the very early stages of making copies of Mark’s Gospel, either the copyist found that the original did not have the words “the Son of God” and so added them; or they were in the original, but the copyist left them out by mistake or on purpose. Different scholars will have different theories why some manuscripts differ from each other.

The discipline of textual criticism involves the attempt to establish as far as possible, the original text of the books of the Bible before all the accidental or deliberate changes. While using this method requires a considerable amount of academic expertise, it is useful for every student of Scripture to have some idea of how the process works. The student will then be able to understand and draw from the footnotes that indicate issues with the text.

You will surely have seen those footnotes in many Bibles showing where there is some doubt about an actual text. An example can be found in the following verse, in which Jesus' responded to the disciples who had asked why they had not been able to cast out a demon.

The text has Jesus say "This kind can come out only by prayer." (Mark 9:29 NIV) The verse has a footnote at the bottom of the page which reads "Some MSS *prayer and fasting*." 'MSS' indicates manuscripts, and some of these have those additional two words.

When these comments appear it indicates that there is some doubt about the original text – was the phrase 'and fasting' added or deleted from the original?. You need then to determine whether the variant reading makes a difference to what you might draw from the text.

How it works

The process of Textual Criticism involves sifting through a large range of manuscripts and seeking to determine what is most likely to have been the original version. All biblical texts were necessarily copied by hand and the scribes may either have made errors, or sought to correct what seemed to them to be errors made by others.

The general reliability of each manuscript is established by its agreement with other manuscripts and versions. This then helps determine the manuscript's value for evaluating variations in other texts.

Some verses or words may have been omitted and some may have been added. For example, one might want to argue that the original of the above verse (Mark 9:29) did not include those words but as the early Christians had the practice of prayer and fasting, a scribe may have thought that the reference to fasting had been inadvertently omitted and so re-instated it.

A principle of the process

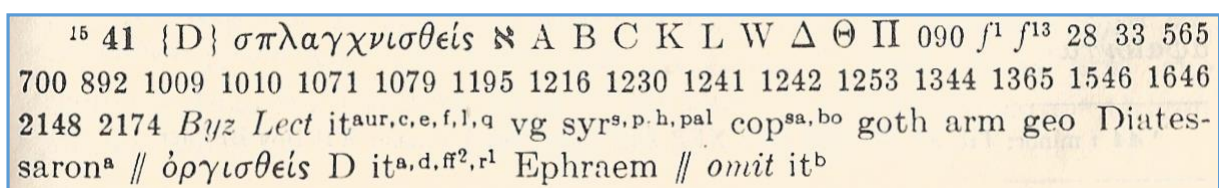
One of the principles that applies is that the more difficult reading is to be preferred. This relates to the fact that a scribe is more likely to change a reading that does not quite seem to fit with the normal understanding of the Christian faith to make it more compatible rather than the other way around.

Here is an example. A leper comes to Jesus saying that if Jesus is willing, he can be healed. We then read that Jesus was “moved with pity,” and healed him. (Mark 1:41 NRSV). There follows a note about an alternative reading, which says that Jesus was “moved with anger.”

How might we understand that? Was Jesus moved with anger at the understanding of the leper that Jesus was not sufficiently loving to care enough to heal him? That might make sense for someone who understood Jesus as showing forth the all-embracing love of God.

On the other hand, a scribe might have a picture of Jesus as one who never displayed any anger. If that was the original reading, one might understand a scribe thinking there had been a mistake and “correcting” it. That is a much more likely scenario than a scribe changing the original word from ‘pity’ to ‘anger’.

Textual Apparatus:



¹⁵ 41 {D} σπλαγχνισθείς ⁂ A B C K L W Δ Θ Π 090 f¹ f¹³ 28 33 565
700 892 1009 1010 1071 1079 1195 1216 1230 1241 1242 1253 1344 1365 1546 1646
2148 2174 Byz Lect it^{aur,c,e,f,l,q} vg syr^{s,p,h,pal} cop^{sa,bo} goth arm geo Diates-
saron^a // ὀργισθείς D it^{a,d,ff²,r¹} Ephraem // omit it^b

In the graphic above, you see the textual apparatus from a Greek New Testament of the variant readings for Mark 9:41. The first word in Greek characters is ‘moved with pity’ and the second Greek word on the bottom line is ‘moved with anger’. The letters and numbers that follow each word indicate the manuscripts in which the text is found in Greek and also in versions from other languages. At the very end we see the word ‘omit’ which indicates that a manuscript left this out completely (they omitted the problem).

As was mentioned earlier, the process is highly technical but you can use the work of textual criticism as expressed in the footnotes of your Bible. You then consider how the various possibilities affect potential meanings of the text.

In a good translation of the Bible, the translators will normally sort out these issues and will indicate where there are significant differences between the ancient manuscripts, like the example from the NIV Bible above. However, translations seldom give any indication as to why a particular reading was preferred to another. To find such reasons, you would have to consult a good commentary. Translators will also try to resolve any difficulty in expressing the meaning of the original language and can also indicate that in footnotes as in the example below.

Isa 52:15: <i>So he shall startle many nations</i>
Footnote: Meaning of Hebrew uncertain

[This means that the translators were unable to know exactly what the Hebrew really meant and thus needed to make an educated guess as to what it meant].

A person exegeting these passages thus needs to ask whether the alternative reading in the footnote changes the meaning of the passage in any significant way, and if so how? The change of meaning might be very important and might help to understand the passage in a whole new way and give us deeper insight into what was originally meant by the writer.

Exegetical Questions that Textual Criticism Asks:

1. Are there any variations between manuscripts from which our English text is derived?
2. Do these textual variations change or affect the meaning of a particular passage? If so how?
3. Compare and contrast various English versions of the original Greek or Hebrew texts. Did the translators of each version make different decisions regarding the textual difficulties? How does the difference in translation affect the meaning of the passage one is being asked to exegete?

Chapter 5

Source/Tradition Criticism

The use of sources is widespread in everyday life. For example, reports in newspapers and on radio and television come from sources such as eyewitness accounts, documents, the Internet, and so on.

Source Criticism and Tradition Criticism are two names to express very similar ideas. Source Criticism asks the question: What sources of information were used by an author?

Tradition Criticism asks a very similar question: “What were the traditions that the author drew on when constructing the story?” Some traditions are passed on through practice - oral traditions, while others might be fully recorded. Different groups in Israel might have had very similar stories about Abraham and Moses but they were told in slightly different ways depending on which tribe and tradition they came from.

The best-known example of source criticism in the Old Testament has been the ‘JEPD’ theory. For centuries it was assumed that Moses was the author of the entire Pentateuch (i.e. Genesis to Deuteronomy). However, scholars began to doubt this. Among other things, they noted that:

- Deuteronomy describes Moses’ death (Deut 34:5-8);
- Genesis mentions the monarchy (Gen 36:31-39);
- The phrase ‘to this day’ is used (Deut 34:6). This indicates a date of authorship later than Moses’ time;
- The same event is repeated in the same book. The technical name given to this is ‘doublets’. For example, in Genesis 1:1-2:25 there are two creation accounts.

The JEPD theory attempts to identify the various sources used for the Pentateuch. Each source is distinguished by the name it uses for God, as well as through differing theological perspectives and different styles of writing. They are called J (the author uses Yahweh or Jaweh as a name for God), E (the author uses Elohim as a name for God), D (stands for the tradition represented by the book of Deuteronomy) and P (represents the tradition represented by the priestly writers, seen most easily in the book of Leviticus). A compiler or compilers joined the various stories from these different sources into the form we have at present. This theory helps to explain some of the variety and features in the Pentateuch mentioned above (Tate 2001: 176).

Similarly, in the New Testament it is widely accepted that Matthew and Luke used Mark's Gospel as their primary source in writing their own Gospels. Matthew and Luke used large sections of Mark's Gospel, which they sometimes changed or edited slightly and combined with information they had received from other sources. Source criticism plays a large role in the question of how the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke came into existence. These Gospels show striking similarities as well as significant differences. The explanation of these similarities and differences is known as the **synoptic problem**.

We won't discuss the synoptic problem and its proposed solutions (Four-source Theory) in detail here, as the matter is extensively dealt with in New Testament studies. However, note that:

- Matthew, Mark and Luke have much content in common in terms of their content. The words of Jesus quoted in them are often almost identical.
- These three Gospels are in agreement in terms of the order of events in Jesus' life. Generally Matthew and Luke follow Mark's order of events. Whenever one of them differs from Mark's order, the other agrees with Mark.
- Matthew reproduces about 606 of Mark's 661 verses, while Luke reproduces about 320.

Matthew	Mark	Luke
606 verses (Matthew contains 92% of Mark)	◀--- 661 verses ---▶	320 verses (Luke contains 48% of Mark)

About 200 verses, which are almost exclusively the sayings of Jesus, are found in Matthew and Luke. Some are found in Matthew only and some in Luke only.

Many scholars believe that when Matthew and Luke wrote their Gospels, they had a copy of Mark in front of them. In addition to this, they had a source which was made up of the sayings of Jesus (which we don't have today). They call this document 'Q', from the German word *Quelle*, which means 'source' (Hunter 1972: 29).

Content that is unique to Luke and Matthew are referred to as 'L' and 'M.' We don't know the original source for this material and simply ascribe it to these gospels

How does source criticism help us to understand better what the New Testament writers have written? Let's look at some examples.

Matthew's use of the Old Testament

We know that the New Testament writers often referred to the Old Testament and often quoted from it. The Old Testament was accepted as Scripture by the church from the very beginning, and so the readers of the New Testament would have quickly recognised the Old Testament quotations, even if they were not always clearly identified by the New Testament writers as such.

The Old Testament was translated from Hebrew into Greek in about 150 BC. This particular translation was called the *Septuagint*. If a New Testament writer translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek himself, we can quickly see this because he would not closely follow the same words that the Septuagint used.

Now it is significant that, when we examine **the Gospel of Matthew**, we find that Matthew used the Septuagint for all his quotations, rather than translating the Hebrew himself. Three explanations are usually put forward to explain this:

1. In spite of the Jewishness of Matthew's Gospel, Matthew was not familiar with Hebrew. Since the spoken language of Matthew's time was not Hebrew, but Aramaic, either Matthew was not Jewish or was not a religious scholar, because a Jewish religious scholar would have learned Hebrew.
2. Matthew was a Jew writing for Gentiles, so he used the 'official' Old Testament translation which they would have known, the Septuagint.
3. Matthew was not a Jew, but a Gentile. The Jewishness of Matthew's Gospel must then be explained by the idea that he was writing for Jews, to introduce them to the Gospel.

It isn't easy to decide which of these ideas explains Matthew's use of the Septuagint. Scholars have generally favoured various versions of the last two suggestions. However, the point is that: The Septuagint was one of Matthew's sources, and this explains why his OT quotations take the form they do.

Paul's use of Greek writers

The book of Acts tells us how Paul preached to the Greek philosophers in Athens (Acts 17: 22-31). In his preaching Paul used their idea of an 'unknown God', to connect what he was saying with what they had already guessed about God. Paul quotes one of their own poets as saying 'For we too are his offspring'. Paul also says 'In him we live and move and have our being', but he does not mention that this is also a quotation from a Greek poem about Zeus (the *Phaenomena* of Aratus).

It is also noteworthy that Paul in this speech quotes nothing from the Old Testament. Looking at the source of his quotations, we realise that Paul, wise to the ways of the Greeks, did not present them with arguments that they would not understand, but used writings and poems which they accepted as authoritative and which reflected their own thoughts. He uses these in the same way he would use the Scriptures when arguing with Jews.

Knowledge of the sources Paul used in this speech assists us in gaining a deeper understanding of Paul's missionary techniques. It also alerts us for things to watch for when we study his letters.

How do those original sources help us to clarify the meaning of a text today?

For example, in Mark 6:34 we read that Jesus had compassion on the crowds because they were like sheep without a shepherd. This phrase “like sheep without a shepherd” is used in Numbers 27:17 with respect to the leadership of God’s people. Moses uses the phrase when pleading with God for God to appoint a successor to him in order that the people would not be like a sheep without a shepherd; people without a leader. Thus by using the phrase in Mark 6:34 the suggestion is that the Jewish people had no genuine successor to Moses. No one was leading the people of Israel like Moses had in the past, even though there were many who claimed to teach the laws of Moses. It is thus a commentary on the poor state of leadership in Israel at the time of Jesus.

Exegetical Questions that Source and Tradition Criticism ask

1. Who wrote the texts?
2. What sources were used in writing the text? In other words, does the author draw on oral tradition; does the author use other written documents to compile his/her own book?
3. How do those original sources help us to clarify the meaning of a text today?

Chapter 6

Form Criticism

Form criticism seeks to understand individual passages of Scripture according to their original form (usually oral) and the historical context which shaped them. It seeks to trace how a passage or unit of Scripture evolved from being passed on by word of mouth (oral tradition) to the point at which it was written down.

This exegetical method first came to prominence through the work of the German Hebrew Bible scholar, Hermann Gunkel around the beginning of the 20th century. He was attempting to go behind Source Theory to assess how the faith of the Hebrew people evolved and developed before it was written down. Form criticism has the view that an orally-transmitted story evolved due to historical and changing circumstances before being written down in its final form. Form criticism therefore, seeks to dig beneath the layers of the retold story; looking at the various literary units as they were then written down and incorporated into the books of the Bible.

Part of the process is classifying each *pericope* according to its literary genre and then seeking to understand the particular situation and need to which the passage would have been applied. This is called their *Sitz im Leben*, “setting in life”.

A pericope is a section of the text that forms a clearly defined unit of that text: e.g. a parable, or a miracle story.

Form Criticism takes the view that the Scriptures are consolidations of accounts, sayings and other forms of literature that were repeated and then finally recorded because they were useful in the building up of the people of God. They, therefore, try to discover why the material took the form it did, and what the situation was that led the teachers to proclaim the stories in the way they did.

For example, scholars began to realise that the book of Psalms was not simply hymns, prayers and poems written by one person or even as one collection. Instead, they realised that the parts that made up the book were produced by the

people of ancient Israel and then gathered together in an attempt to express and satisfy their individual and communal religious needs.

Form critics ask questions like these:

- How was this story used by the original tellers of the story?
- What situation was this story used in?
- How did that situation shape how the story grew and developed?

Let's look at a few examples:

Many scholars believe that the way in which material concerning the life and teaching of Jesus was passed on to the congregations of the early Church, is of fundamental importance.

Some scholars suggest that many of the **Gospel stories** of Jesus were shaped by the congregational instruction and liturgical preaching of the early Church. Rather than the Gospel being an attempt to write a history or a biography of Jesus' life and ministry, they are a collection of preached stories that were useful to early Christians. The form in which those stories were told and used became the form in which they were later recorded. That also helps us understand more about the issues faced by the early Church and how they dealt with them as they remembered what Jesus had said and done. Their use of those remembrances enables us to apply the texts to our own situations.

For example, as Gentiles came into this new community, issues were raised by those who wished to retain observance of the Mosaic Law. Metzger (1983:85) shows that Jesus' engagement with the Pharisees served as a guide for dealing with this situation. The frequent retelling of Jesus' conflicts with the Pharisees resulted in a clearly defined literary form which form critics call the pronouncement story. The pattern is easy to detect in the Gospels: everything in the narrative is pared down to bare essentials in order to place emphasis on the concluding pronouncement made by Jesus.

The story in Mark 2:23-28 provides an apt illustration. First a single sentence describes the situation: "One Sabbath he was going through the grain-fields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck ears of grain" (vs. 23).

Next follows the objection not only as Jesus heard it from the Pharisees but also as the early Gentile Christians heard it from their critics: "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" (vs. 24).

This objection is met with a rebuttal by Jesus, culminating in a memorable pronouncement which later would serve as a principle of action for the expanding church: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath; so the Son of man is lord even of the Sabbath" (vss. 27-28; Metzger 1983: 86)

Form criticism says that the life situations of preaching and teaching among early Christians shaped the stories of Jesus into five main types of stories, each with a similar form and structure:

- 1 . **Pronouncement stories.** These are stories that lead to some authoritative statement or 'pronouncement' by Jesus e.g. the statement that the Sabbath was made for humankind, and not vice-versa (Mark 2:23-28)
- 2 . **Miracle stories.** Stories about healings and exorcisms (Mark 5:1-20)
- 3 . **Example stories.** Stories which set forth Jesus as a good example, and his disciples as good or bad examples (e.g. Judas betraying Jesus and Peter denying his Lord)
- 4 . **Supernatural break-through stories.** Incidents in which the supernatural breaks through into the secular events in Jesus' life (e.g. his baptism, temptations in the desert, the transfiguration)
- 5 . **Parables and teaching.** These record Jesus' teaching, and are a guide for the behaviour and attitudes of Christians.

As you examine some of the **Psalms** it is possible to get a sense of how these songs and poems were originally used. Gunkel classified the Psalms according to their subject matter, for example, thanksgiving, praise, lament etc. and these have been further categorised as individual or communal, and narrative or descriptive (Westermann 1980: 20).

For Example:

Psalms 47 was clearly written to be used as a song. It is introduced with the notes: "For the director of music". This immediately gives us a clue as to its use, most probably in communal worship. The fact that it refers to a director of music

means that it would have been used in an official public setting where there would have been musicians or singers that needed to be directed.

The Psalm also contains phrases that invite people to clap and to shout and to sing praises. This suggests an act of communal worship. In verse 5 it speaks of God ascending to the sound of trumpets. This brings to mind a religious procession, possibly up mount Zion to the Temple where it was believed God dwelt. The reference to God going up and being seated on his holy throne reinforces this. It is thus possible that this Psalm was part of an enthronement ceremony in which the Ark was carried up to the Temple either after a victory in battle, or as part of an annual celebration, (see Williams 2006:2; Keck 1998:868).

Psalm 24 is often described as an 'entrance liturgy'.

"Perhaps more than any other psalm, Psalm 24 allows the interpreter to imagine a liturgical ceremony in which it must have been used... Verse 1-2 consist of an opening profession of faith by the worshipers; vv. 3-6 offer and exchange between worshipers (v.3) and priests (vv. 4-6) concerning entrance into the sanctuary; and vv 7-10 consist of a responsorial liturgy that takes place as the processional prepares to enter the temple gates. It is very possible that the procession accompanied the bringing of the ark into the sanctuary (see Samuel 6; Ps 132:8-10)" (Keck 1998:772).

In due course, other parts of the Old Testament came to be looked at through the lens of Form Criticism. Genesis was examined as "'stories'... expressing the folk life of the people. Prophetic books...were seen to contain smaller literary units, each quite reflective of different life settings." (Hayes and Holladay 2007: 79)

When applying Form Criticism to the book of **Hebrews** in the New Testament some suggest that the form of the Book of Hebrews has similarities to a Sermon. Some scholars therefore suggest that it was first used as a sermon in a service of worship or Eucharist.

Conclusion

Form Criticism focusses on the situations in which oral versions of stories were used in the life of the people of God before they became recorded in Scripture.

These practical messages and stories are then easily received by the new hearers, within their own (new) context.

Exegetical Questions that Form Criticism Asks:

1. What literary genre is the text? Narrative (Story), History, Myth, Legend, Poetry, Law, Letter, Sermon?
2. In what life situation would this portion of Scripture have been originally used? Eg. Many of the Psalms were used as songs, hymns and prayers in Temple worship; Ruth was probably told at a festival celebration (Shavot) and Jonah was probably told as a folk tale in the town square or around the camp-fire; Paul's letters were probably first read in the context of a Church service with the whole community present; 1 Peter and Hebrews may have been sermons that were preached and written down.
1. How did that situation give specific shape how the passage/story as it then grew and developed?
2. When identifying appropriate contexts for the story, how does this life situation help us to understand the meaning and purpose of the story?
3. How did the life situation influence the "form" or "shape" and structure of the text that we are trying to exegete?
4. What does the literary genre tell us about the life situation in which it was written and used? How do the shape, form and structure of the passage give us clues to uncover the kind of life-situation the passage was originally used in? Eg. the rhythm, content and structure of some of the psalms help us to know what kind of temple ceremonies they would have first been used in. This again can help us to understand better how to interpret the meaning of the text.

Chapter 7

Historical Criticism

Through the method of **historical criticism**, we learn how to study and understand the background of the biblical texts. We take into account, first, the historical period in which each source came into being, and its focus on the situation of that time. We need to understand the customs of that time too, many of which may seem strange to us. We also need to know the issues that the editor or the author was seeking to address at the time when they wrote or edited their material, so that we can see how these texts attempt to speak into those issues.

What were the *urim* and *thummim* (Exodus 28:30)? Where was the Decapolis, and who lived there (Mark 7:31)? Who were the Samaritans, and why did Jesus make one of them a hero in a story he told (Luke 10)? Who were the Assyrians? What did they do to Israel (2 Kings 17:5)? How did that affect Israel's faith? Does any of this matter, anyway?

All these and many other questions are the focus of **historical criticism**, which seeks to understand the circumstances and the background to the issues that the biblical text addresses.

This involves many things, and various disciplines are employed such as linguistics, sociology, anthropology, and comparative studies.

The main thrust of historical criticism, and its basic principle, is to establish what the original readers and hearers would have understood from the text *before* we try to apply that same text to the present. This is fundamental to the TEEC approach to exegesis. So it involves the study of all appropriate background information we can find relating to the text and the situation being addressed.

We need to remember that “before the books of the Bible were Ecclesiastical Scripture, they were real communication between an author and a set of readers” (Moyise 1998: 11). As is often said, none of the writers thought that they were writing scripture.

What is most important however is that **only** the historical information that helps explain the text itself should be included in such an exegesis. Background history and information that does not help to explain the meaning of the specific text might be interesting but is useless for the goal of the exegetical task. Our purpose when using this method is not to show how knowledgeable we are in general history, but to explain what the text meant to the original readers, and we demonstrate how we arrived at that conclusion. Information that does not help us understand the text needs to be left out!

It is widely recognized that this is an essential approach to the interpreting of scripture. There may be other important and helpful approaches that can complement the historical critical approach, but it is foolish to ignore the original history and culture behind the text, otherwise it becomes very easy to misinterpret a passage.

Exegetical questions that historical exegesis asks

Historical criticism helps us to investigate every aspect of the original context.

So it asks questions like these:

1. Who wrote the text?
2. Why was it written?
3. When was it written?
4. Who was it written for?
5. What were the circumstances?
6. What historical information do we have about the people/characters, events, or places referred to in the text?



What?
When?
Where?
Who?
Why?

(This is part of what is called ‘the implied background’ – information that the original reader would have known about, but that a modern reader can only learn through wider reading and research.) We might even ask whether there were other historical events that happened at the time of writing, or at the time of the

events in the text, that help us to understand the wider context and circumstances of the text.

7. What do the names of people and places mean?

*Many cultures, including biblical ones, ascribe important meanings to the names of people and places – for example, ‘Barnabas’ meant ‘son of encouragement’ (see **Acts 4:36**).*

8. What words or phrases refer to cultural customs or norms?

*In John 4 (the story of Jesus talking to a Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well), we have two issues that show Jesus crossing culturally-established boundaries. He asks the woman for a drink, but she objects because that should never happen between Jews and Samaritans (see **John 4:9**). Sometimes, as here, the appropriate background information is given in the text. In other cases – as in **John 4:27**, where the disciples are astonished that Jesus is talking with a woman, we are not told why they were astonished. Through exploring the historical and cultural background of that era we would discover that custom did not allow a woman to talk to a rabbi (which is what Jesus was often called). So, in this story, Jesus crosses two important boundaries: one religious (explained in the text itself), the other gender-based (explained through further research and background reading).*

9. What words or phrases refer to the Jewish, Greek, and Roman religious world of that time (religious practices, rituals, religious groups, religious or philosophical ideas, etc.)?

*What did they mean then? For example, the word *logos* in **John 1:1-5** was used in Greek philosophy. It is usually translated ‘word’; but it also meant something like ‘the mind of God’, or the ‘reason and logic that hold everything together’. Another example: ‘phylacteries’ in **Matthew 23:5** were little boxes that devout Jews tied on to their foreheads, containing portions of the Torah/Law. This would need to be explained to people who don’t know what phylacteries are.*

10. What references are there to geography, names of towns, rivers, mountains, places, etc.?

*How do these details help us to understand the meaning of the passage? (Sometimes it might help to investigate the meaning of the names of towns and places.) For example, In **John 11** (the story of the death and raising of Lazarus), we are told that he lived in the town of Bethany. The name Bethany comes from the Aramaic “beit ’anya”, meaning ‘house of the poor/affliction’. It has been suggested that Bethany got its name because it was where the Essene community operated a poor-house or hospice for the poor and the afflicted of the land. So we might ask whether the author meant to use the name ‘Bethany’ in a symbolic sense, emphasising that Lazarus symbolically represents the poor, and that Jesus’ closest friends, Mary, Martha and Lazarus, were themselves among the poor of Palestine. In **John 9:7** it is clear that John locates the story in ‘Siloam’ (‘sent’) and gives it symbolic importance: Jesus ‘sends’ the blind man to wash in the pool at Siloam. It seems that the writer of John’s Gospel wants us to take note of the meaning of the names of places, and how they shine light on his original intention.*

For each of the above questions, we need to ask ourselves: How does this information help me understand the text better? Does it give me further insight into the meaning of the text meant as intended in the context in which it was first written?

Chapter 8

Redaction Criticism

Redaction criticism⁵ acknowledges that an author might have used material from different sources and different traditions and then formed them into one narrative. It goes further and proposes that the author or editor also had their own viewpoint and opinion, which they then expressed in the way they chose to edit their sources when compiling their text. Redaction criticism asks the question: How did the editor use the sources and then put them together in a new document with a new viewpoint? Luke and Matthew clearly both used Mark's Gospel as their major source, but each used Mark in different ways, depending on their own perspectives.

Redaction criticism begins to account for the differences we find across similar or common sources and stories.

The writer (or redactor) of Luke's Gospel is believed to have used Mark's Gospel as a major source. Another source used by Luke is a document that scholars call "Q" (believed to have included a list of Jesus sayings). "Q" was also used by Matthew. However there are parts of Luke which are found nowhere else (possibly Luke's own ideas, interviews and perspective). In putting all these things together from various sources, but as one document, the Gospel of Luke then gives its own unique perspective on the story of Jesus. A version of that story which also highlights Luke's particular concerns (such as women or the poor).

Matthew's Gospel is believed to have been put together in a very similar way using Mark as the main source, however with a stronger focus on the connection of Jesus and the Christian faith to the Hebrew Bible and Judaism.

⁵ 'Redaction' means 'editing' or 'editorial'. The Afrikaans word 'redakteur', a person who edits a book, newspaper, or magazine, comes from the same Latin root.

Therefore, even though Luke and Matthew clearly both used Mark's Gospel as their major source, each author used Mark in a different way, depending on their individual perspectives.

"The scene describing Jesus' death on the cross (Matt. 27:45-56; Mark 15:33-41; Luke 23:44-49; see John 19:17-37) may serve as an example. Reading the accounts carefully, we note that each one has its own distinctive profile. Matthew's account is longer than Mark's, while Luke's is shorter. Matthew has redacted Mark by expanding it, Luke by abbreviating it. Specific points are also different. In Matthew, the death of Jesus is followed by the tearing of the temple veil and an earthquake which results in tombs being opened and saints being resurrected. Neither Mark nor Luke reports this sequence of events. Luke, in contrast to Matthew, omits certain features of Mark's account, most notably the cry of dereliction, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" (Mark 15:34; also Matt. 27:46). Instead of this, Luke records Jesus final words on the cross as follows: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit!" (Luke 23:46). These last words of Jesus are recorded in none of the other Gospels (cf. John 19:30).

Another important difference is the words attributed to the Roman centurion standing guard at the crucifixion. Matthew follows Mark in recording his confession as "Truly this man was God's Son!" (Mark 15:39; Matt. 27:54). Luke's account of the confession is completely different: "Certainly this man was innocent" (Luke 23:47).

Redaction critics, rather than trying to harmonize these differences into a single story, try to let each account speak for itself."
(Hayes and Holladay 2007:130).

When we compare Mark's Gospel to Matthew and Luke we see that additional special themes have been introduced that are not contained in Mark's Gospel:

A theme in Luke's Gospel is that Jesus is the fulfilment of the Old Testament idea of jubilee. This is not a strong theme in Mark. Luke also has a greater emphasis on the role of women in the ministry of Jesus. He also has a stronger focus on the Gentiles. Sometimes Luke may change material from Mark to highlight his particular themes.

The same is true of Matthew's Gospel. The writer/redactor of Matthew also introduces his own themes as he uses and edits Mark's Gospel. Thus as he uses Mark's Gospel, the redactor of Matthew introduces the theme of Jesus as the fulfilment of the Old Testament. He introduces the theme of Jesus as the new Moses. He introduces an emphasis on the Law as well as parables of judgement that were not in Mark's Gospel. He changes the name of the 'Kingdom of God' to the 'Kingdom of Heaven' to make his Gospel more readable for Jewish readers who believed that the name of God was sacred and should not be referred to directly.

A working example

Let's compare Mark 8:14-21 and its parallel in Matthew's Gospel (Matthew 16:5-12). Remember that redaction criticism is not something that can be applied to a text in isolation. The text under investigation may have similarities and parallels to other texts, and it also stands in relation to the point of view/themes of the gospel writers involved.

We start then with the major themes and concerns of the writers/redactors:

In this text Mark's focus is on the disciples' understanding of Jesus. In Mark 4:41 the disciples ask each other the question "Who is this man?" Mark 8:14-21 is also concerned with this question. At this point in the Gospel the question has not been answered, and here Mark is concerned with the disciple's failure to do so.

Matthew's gospel has a different focus. The gospel was written for Jewish Christians during a time of growing conflict. The Pharisees, who were developing what later became 'Rabbinic Judaism', are in conflict with Jesus and discredit his teaching and his followers. Matthew wants to show that the Jewish Christians are on the right side in this conflict, and that Christianity is the ultimately the fulfilment of Judaism. Matthew uses this passage to show that Jesus warned his followers against the teachings of the Pharisees. We will make some suggestions as to how Matthew might have done some editing to achieve his purpose.

First Matthew 'tidies up' Mark's writing. The first significant change is that he replaces 'the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod' with 'the yeast of the Pharisees and the Sadducees'. This makes sense when we look at the historical background of the text (that is, if we ask ourselves: who are these names groups of people?). First we note that the Pharisees and the Sadducees were two separate groups within first-century Judaism, each with their own distinct teaching, and that 'Herod' refers to a local ruler imposed on the Jewish people as a compromise political appointment. Secondly we see at the end of our text that Matthew interprets Jesus' reference to "yeast" as an allusion to the 'teaching' of certain people. Since Herod was not a religious teacher, Matthew is concerned with religious teaching, he had to change the text slightly, replacing 'Herod' with 'the Sadducees', since the Sadducees had a distinct body of teaching to offer. This point will be picked up again when we examine the endings of the passages.

Matthew's text has "you of little faith", while Mark's does not. Matthew wants to highlight that the disciples misunderstood Jesus because they were worried about their failure in their duty of ensuring that they had brought food. Jesus points out that he is able to produce food by a miracle at any time he chooses, and so he is not concerned with food. In Matthew this is a rather gentle reprimand compared to the section in Mark's Gospel that this comment replaces.

Mark's version is much harsher. 'Hardness of heart' refers not simply to a failure to understand, but to wilful disobedience. Even worse things follow. Look back at Mark 4:10-12. In that section, Jesus talks about 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. The disciples are on the inside, but Jesus says this about those on the outside:

'When they see, they shall see and not perceive, And when they hear, they shall hear but not understand, lest they should turn back and be forgiven.'

But now it is the disciples who are like the outsiders, and Jesus asks the question: 'Are you really my disciples, or are you one of those who listen to me, but are not really interested?' Mark shows not only how they fail to understand Jesus, but also that Jesus is impatient and angry with their failure.

Matthew abbreviates Jesus' questions to the disciples about the two stories of feeding the multitudes, for here Mark is emphasising the disciples' failure. In Mark's version of the story, when Jesus asks how many baskets of pieces they picked up, the disciples answer him, showing that they saw and remember the details of the miracles. But that did not give them any insight into who this man Jesus was, and Jesus ends the conversation on a frustrated note: 'Do you still not understand [who I am]?'

Matthew continues with Jesus explaining that he is not talking about bread, but about the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees. In his version, the rather dim disciples at last understand (Matthew does not try to show the disciples as perfect – even though the original readers of this text will know them as the apostolic leaders of the church). The question arises as to whether Matthew added this comment or whether Mark deleted it when working from his original sources. The clue is found earlier in the passage, where Mark refers to the 'yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod'. Mark's version is not really concerned with who these people are, but rather with the disciples' failure to understand who Jesus is. Mark has no reason for introducing 'Herod' to replace another word from his source, and so is unlikely to have made such a change. Since Herod did not teach any particular sort of religious doctrine, it would make no sense if the passage in Mark's source also ended with a discussion of the teaching of any religious group (as Matthew does).

Redaction criticism was originally developed as a technique for the analysis of the New Testament writings. Later it was adapted for the study of the Hebrew Bible. However, the principles behind this exegetical approach have long been recognised as being valid for **Old Testament** studies. Scholars realised that

certain biblical writings showed a particular theological view or sought to proclaim a specific theological message.

For example:

It is clear that the various editors of the Pentateuch imposed their own views on the material they received, in order to convey their own theological message.

The author of Chronicles interprets the stories and traditions from the books of Samuel and Kings in a way that suits his purpose. David is set out in a less realistic way in 1 Chronicles than in 1 and 2 Samuel. In 1 Chronicles, the picture painted of him is an idealistic one. The two depictions of David are very different because each author has specific and differing intentions which they apply to their writing/redacting (Hayes and Holladay 2007: 106-107).

Exegetical Questions that Redaction Criticism Asks:

1. What is the redactor's (editor's/writer's) own point of view? What are the key thematic emphases of the redactor?

For example, while Luke uses Mark as his major source, Luke considers Jesus to be standing in the tradition of Elijah, that Jesus fulfils the Jubilee teachings of Leviticus, that Jesus is the friend of the poor and the outcast, and that Jesus has a mission to the Gentiles. The writer/redactor of Luke's Gospel has therefore adapted the stories from Mark's Gospel, as well as at least two other sources, to give us his/her own perspective on Jesus.

2. How does this help us to better understand the meaning of the text before us?
3. Does the text I am trying to exegete contain the special emphasis or themes of the redactor?

For example if I am looking at a passage from Luke's Gospel, do some of Luke's special themes listed above appear in the text?

4. What comes directly before or after the specific text we are analysing? Why did the redactor put the one story or section next to the other? Does this help to clarify the meaning of the current text?

For example, in Luke's Gospel the passage of Jesus visiting the home of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42) comes after the parable of the Good Samaritan (a passage about service) and before a passage where Jesus teaches about prayer. Perhaps in Luke 10:38-42, the writer/redactor of Luke's Gospel is wanting us to reflect on the balance between service and prayer in the life of a disciple?

Chapter 9

Literary Criticism

When you read or hear the words “Once upon a time...”, you are probably at the start of a children’s story.

If you open a magazine and see a paragraph that begins, “A priest, a rabbi, and an imam were walking down the road...”, you prepare for a laugh, as a type of joke starts with that phrase.

If you pick up a piece of paper, and the opening words are “My darling Josephine...”, you suspect that what you have in your hand is a love letter. Each of these is a particular type of writing; and as soon as you hear the opening words, you quickly form an idea of what to expect and of your likely response.

Literary criticism is the study of the Bible as literature. It approaches the Bible as a piece of literature in the same way as English or Russian or French literature is studied at a university. This does not lack respect for the Bible as Scripture – a holy text – but recognises that in its written form it is still a literary work. Literary criticism thus involves looking at what **type** of literature the various parts of the Bible are, which then assists our interpretation (and our exegesis).

This method of exegesis has become prominent from the middle of the 20th century, although its roots are earlier. Originally literary criticism had a broader scope that included establishing authorship, the date of writing, etc. Currently literary criticism simply focuses on the text itself as a literary creation, and classifies it according to its genre (issues of authorship, etc. are dealt with using the other critical tools of biblical criticism).

Literary criticism focuses primarily on the type of writing, or *genre*, of the text and how the use of specific genre by the author/redactor affects the understanding of the text.

For example, when we read, “The sun rises and the sun goes down, and hurries to the place where it rises” (Ecclesiastes 1:5 NRSV), we don’t need to be told that this is not a scientific description of either the sun or its place in the universe: it is clearly poetry, and so we interpret both this verse and the section it comes from *as poetry*.

Similarly, when we read of trees getting together to anoint a king and asking one another in turn who would accept that role, we know that we are reading a fable, or an allegory (Judges 9:7-21).

There many genres in the Bible, and some of these are fairly common in people’s experience. The more familiar ones are listed briefly below, with some examples. Then we look a little more in-depth at the less-familiar kinds.

Poetry: Much of the Bible is in poetic language. Apart from the more obvious literature like the psalms, in many of the prophetic books the sayings of the prophets are expressed poetically. Hebrew poetry ‘rhymed’, not in similar sounding words as in English, but in repeating meaning – for example: “Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her, that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid” (Isaiah 40:2 NRSV) where the second and fourth clauses echo the first and third. Some Bible versions print the text in poetic form.

Hymns: Many Psalms were written in the form of hymns, and hymns are also included with narrative (Revelation 11:17-18, 15:3-4 and Philippians 2:5-11).

Wisdom: This genre appears mainly in the books of Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, although it also can be found in some psalms and in some of the prophetic books. This type of literature stands apart from the rest of the Hebrew Bible, as it focuses on humanity and life in general, rather than on the particular history of the Hebrew nation (Anderson 1988: 570).

Historical narrative: This genre tells the story of the action of God in creating a people. Aspects of it take epic form (e.g. Exodus) with a heightened sense of Israel's identity as God's people and of heroic figures of the past.

Allegory: This genre involves interpreting a story in such a way that every detail of the story has a symbolic meaning. It is important not to interpret non-allegorical texts as if they were allegorical.

Fable: This is a story that involves fanciful detail – such as animals or trees speaking (see Judges 9 again) – to teach a moral or a lesson.

Prophecy: In this genre, prophets proclaim a message from God. We need to note that 'prophecy' does not primarily mean 'predicting the future' (our modern understanding) – although there may be, for example, a future consequence of an action about which people are being warned.

Parable: A parable, a story with a message, is a form of illustration used often by Jesus, where something well-known is compared to Jesus' understanding of God's rule. The aim of a parable is to make His teaching clear and effective. The illustration may be short or long. Often it contains the "ambush of the unexpected." Examples include 'The Sower' (Luke 8:4-8), 'The Good Samaritan' (Luke 10:25-37) and 'The Rich Fool' (Luke 12:13-21).

Short story: The books of Ruth and Jonah fall into this category: they proclaim truth in a form similar to an extended parable.

Gospel: While the nature of the gospel genre is still debated, it is best to start by defining what it is not. The gospels are not normal history or biography. The focus is *kerygmatic* (proclaiming). This means that the gospels are better described as a form of 'written preaching' with a missional purpose, presenting largely symbolic portraits of Jesus as the One who can be believed and followed. Their purpose is to draw forth "a response of faith and to bring salvation" (Brown 1999: 194).

Letter: The writings of Paul and of others in the New Testament focus mostly on correcting and encouraging the new Christian communities. Many of the New Testament letters were written to specific communities to deal with issues that

they faced in their time and context. See, for example, Paul's handling of the issue of whether or not Christians should eat meat (1 Corinthians 10:23–11:1).

Apocalyptic: We deal with this genre in a little more detail, as it is one that is often misunderstood, and so gives rise to a number of suspect interpretations.

The main biblical examples for this genre are Daniel and Revelation, although there are sections of other books that also fall into this category, such as Ezekiel's visions, and Mark 13 (sometimes described as the 'little apocalypse').

The term comes from the Greek word *apokalypsis*, which means 'revelation'. The writings in this genre seek to 'reveal what is hidden'. They do so mainly through the description of visions in a narrative style, and try to show that the transcendent power of God will triumph over the current difficult circumstances of persecution that the people are facing. This literature can be described as 'tracts for bad times' (Metzger 1983: 266).

We can find a key to some of the weird symbolism in Revelation by comparing it with the books of Daniel and Ezekiel in the Hebrew Bible. While we might not understand every detail, what we are meant to learn from these books is the overwhelming sense of the majesty of God and the proclamation that, ultimately, God will triumph. The refrain that comes from apocalyptic literature is "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns" (Revelation 19:6 NRSV).

Structural criticism

A related approach to literary criticism is called 'structural criticism', in which we analyse how the author has structured the text.

Does the author use repetition? Does the author use polarities and oppositions such as left / right, good / bad, up / down, subject / object, light / darkness, male / female, etc (Hayes and Holladay 2007: 140)?

Sometimes authors use patterns in their style of writing, repeating and contrasting ideas throughout a passage. Some of these patterns are obvious and easy to see; others are more complex, and can be described as 'deep structures'. Analysing these patterns can help to uncover a particular author's emphasis.

Important questions asked by the literary critic include:

1. What style or genre is the book written in? Is it poetry, parable, history, short story, prophecy etc...? Different forms of writing create different expectations of the text.
2. How does the style, form or genre of writing compare with other ancient styles of writing from other nations and other cultures?
3. How is the text arranged or organised?
4. What techniques of language does the author use?
5. What mood is created by the style of writing?
6. What strategy of writing has the author used?
7. How has the author used imagination to capture the attention and mind of the reader? (Hayes and Holladay 2007: 91)

Chapter 10

Grammatical Criticism

Grammatical Criticism is one of the oldest forms of Biblical Criticism, because it deals with the meaning of words in their original language. Grammatical Criticism thus analyses a text through its use of language (Hayes and Holladay 2007:72) by analysing the ways in which words are put together and the way in which sentences are structured, the meaning of the original words and how this affects the meaning of the text. It assumes that the language of the text gives critical readers access to thoughts of the author/s where individual words function as carriers of meaning. We therefore, need to make every effort to understand the context in a word arises so as to ascribe to it the meaning that the author intended. Knowing when a “horse” is just a “horse” and not a metaphor for some dark apocalyptic event helps us to accurately discern the original meaning of the text.

Bible dictionaries, wordbooks, lexicons and Biblical concordances are important for this approach to analysing the Bible. (For those who have a computer, E-Sword is a free Bible program that can be downloaded from the internet. It contains a concordance that helps you to see the meaning of the original Greek and Hebrew words.)

Every time a person translates the Bible from the original languages (Greek, Aramaic or Hebrew), they are engaging in Grammatical Criticism. They need to analyse the text in its original language and decide how to translate certain words and phrases and sentences by looking at the meaning of the words in the original language, and how the phrases and sentence structures have been put together. They do this because words can have different meanings in different contexts, and the way a sentence is put together can also affect the meaning of the sentence.

Look at the following example, which demonstrates how important grammatical analysis and the careful reading that goes with it, could be in the interpretation of Genesis 3:15. Notice the differing translations below.

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; **he** will **strike** your head, and you will strike his heel”. (Gen 3:15, NRSV)

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between her offspring and hers; **he** will **crush** your head and you will strike his heel”. (Gen 3:15, NIV)

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your brood and hers. **They** shall **strike** at your head and you shall strike at their heel”. (Gen 3:15, NEB)

You may need to look up a key word like “enmity” in an English dictionary, because it is not commonly used in conversation today. Second, there are some minor differences among these versions which need little or no attention. The placement of "And" at the beginning of the NIV reading is of no real significance. The meanings of "brood" and "offspring" are not significantly different.

Third, notice that the NEB translates as plurals two pronouns in the final sentence which are singular in the other versions. This should cause you to ask some questions. If you could read Hebrew, you would notice that the pronouns are actually singular. If you do not read Hebrew, consulting additional versions and exegetical commentaries should lead you to the same discovery. This difference may be of little significance, but you might gain some interesting insight by thinking about what the NEB is trying to communicate by this choice of translation. It has become fairly common in Christian interpretation of Genesis 3 to associate the snake with Satan, though the concept of an individual arch-villain developed much later than the book of Genesis. The NEB, on the other hand, is promoting and understanding that the enmity is between snakes and human beings.

Fourth, and most important is the use of the verb "crush" in the NIV. Notice that the other two versions each use "strike" twice. Is this significant? For a long time this verse has been considered important in the Christian tradition. It has been proposed that the second half of the verse speaks prophetically about Jesus and Satan. Satan will strike Jesus heel (the crucifixion) and Jesus shall crush Satan's head (the resurrection). This interpretation is dependent upon the one verb (crush) having a stronger meaning than the other (strike). In Hebrew, however, the same word is used both times, and a careful examination of numerous versions, together with a good commentary, would lead you to this discovery. It is clear that this "prophetic" reading is incorrect, and that certain versions, like the NIV, push readers in the direction of this wrong conclusion. Careful attention to the grammar of the text will help you avoid such mistakes.

Translating words from the original Hebrew and Greek is not always easy, just as some words in seSotho, isiZulu, or Afrikaans are difficult to translate into English, and vice versa. So too in Hebrew or Greek a word can sometimes have a number of possible meanings. It is then up to the translator to try and decide which meaning was intended by the Biblical author. For example, in Matthew 6:33, "Seek first God's Kingdom and his righteousness", the word for "Righteousness" (dikaïosunē: pronounced dik-ah-yos-oo'-nay) according to Strong's Concordance G1343, can mean "Equity [equality or harmony] of Character and Act". This meaning suggests that righteousness is not simply about being "right" or adhering to a right set of rules or laws, but about living a balanced and harmonious life, balanced within oneself and balanced in relationship with others, treating them fairly and with equal dignity. This is a much broader and richer interpretation of the word righteousness than the usual English understanding of the word, which is often interpreted from the perspective of obeying or disobeying a set of rules or laws.

In Mark 2:4 the word that is translated as 'crowd' is the Greek word '*ochlos*' (pronounced o'-khlos). It is a very specific word that means more than just a group of people. According to Ahn Byung (quoted in Myers 1988:156), "the term *ochlos* appears in Greek documents referring to a confused majority, or to the ordinary soldiers in a combat unit but not to officers. It also refers to non-combat people who follow the army and perform menial duties (duties of a

servant). We must note that the anonymous people referred to as the *ochlos* are differentiated from the ruling class.” In Strong’s concordance the term *ochlos* could therefore also be translated as rabble or a riot of people (G3793).

Therefore understanding the word ‘*ochlos*’ in its original Greek helps the reader to understand the central place the poor and dispossessed people played in Jesus’ ministry as a key focus of his concern. If we did not understand the true meaning of the term *ochlos* we would not be able to see and understand as clearly the socio-economic implications of Mark’s portrayal of Jesus.

Exegetical Questions that Grammatical Criticism Asks:

1. What did the original Greek/Hebrew/Aramaic words mean within the language and culture in which they were being used?
2. How does the original meaning of these words help us better understand the possible meanings of the text for us today?
3. How does the grammar and sentence structure of the original Greek, Aramaic and Hebrew help to emphasize or determine the meaning.

Chapter 11

Narrative Criticism

Narrative criticism is a more recent approach to studying and analysing the stories of the Bible.

This is a method that has been adapted from some methods of secular language studies and applied to scripture to enable us to draw forth meaning from the narrative texts of the Bible (whether historical or fictional – such as parables).

At the broad level, scripture is itself the story of God’s dealings with the whole of creation and particularly with humankind. It is overwhelmingly narrative. Many of the books are either entirely narrative or contain a substantial portion of narrative. Most of the time, though, when we are preparing teachings and especially sermons, we deal with much smaller sections of scripture, and many of these are entirely narrative. Narrative Criticism uses the tools that the study of literature has given us to engage more deeply with these stories.

The major importance of Narrative Criticism is that it gets us to focus on the actual text. Many of us will have heard the same stories over many years and assume that we know them. Narrative Criticism (along with other text-centred methods of exegesis) helps us to read what is actually there rather than simply draw from what we think we remember.

An important facet of this approach is that the narrative is regarded as a perfectly constructed text. Nothing is in the text by chance. Everything in it has a purpose.

Narrative Criticism encourages us to engage with the story that is being recounted, to examine its structure, to discern the way the story “moves” and to engage with the characters, discerning their relative importance. All this is not as an end in itself, but a way to draw forth the meaning of the text, so that we can apply it to our situations.

As with all text-centred exegetical methods, the narrative is treated as an entity in itself. Narrative criticism is not concerned with the historical background or origins of a text, but with the final form of the story itself. We are not so much concerned with the author's production process as we are with the product that has been created. We treat the text simply as a finished article, rather like a painting, and seek to discern what it says in itself and then through that, what it says to us.

That means that narrative criticism focuses on the text that we have, rather than treating it as a subject for textual criticism, form criticism and redaction criticism.

One of the advantages of this approach is that it enables discussion to take place between Christians across a broad spectrum because the questions that would normally divide people are not part of a Narrative Critical approach.

How does one go about a Narrative Critical exegesis?

Ideally Narrative Criticism requires us to focus on a whole narrative, and since most Biblical writers constructed the entire book to tell their story, the book needs to be analysed as a whole. However, since that is usually impractical, we look at smaller sections of the narrative – but keeping in mind that the smaller section is part of the whole narrative and should not contradict it.

The narrative method requires us to identify a range of components in the narrative that help us discover the meaning of the story in the text.

The author chooses elements to make up the narrative, each of which helps to build the story – and therefore the meaning that the author wants to convey through the story.

- We look at the author and reader(s). Who is it that is telling the story, and to whom is it being told?
- After that, we look at the characters in the story.
- Then we look at the setting of the story

- Then we examine the sequence of events – the plot
- Finally, we look at the theme.

In this way we identify the constituent parts of the narrative in order that we may discern the flow of the story.

1. Authors and Readers, Narrators and Narratees.

Narrative Criticism makes distinctions that affect how we regard the author and the reader(s). These distinctions refer to categories such as the narrator, narratees, author and readers, both real and implied. Let's explore these.

Real author and real reader(s).

Behind the text is the person or persons who wrote it. We may, for example, be able to identify Luke as the author of his gospel and the book of the Acts of the Apostles. For narrative critical purposes, this identification is important only insofar as it affects our understanding of the text, for example by identifying the place of writing and the author perspectives. Similarly, while there were actual people who originally read (or heard) the text, we do not concern ourselves with them. *We* are the people who now read (or hear) the text. Therefore the real reader of the text is: You!

Our main focus is the text in its current form, and we use that as the primary source for meaning, rather than any other background knowledge.

Implied Author

The implied author is the picture of the author that we obtain from our reading of the text. The text itself and what it contains is our reference at this point.

We may have some knowledge of the Implied Author from outside the text, but our main picture will be from what we discern within the text itself.

Real Author: The person who actually wrote the story or book.

We do not always know exactly who wrote the books of the Bible.

Implied author: Whether or not we know who the author is, we look in the text for clues about what values and perspectives s/he may have had, and through this, we try to construct a picture of the author.

For example, in the account of the ten lepers in Luke 17, we may imply a picture of the author who has a concern for the breaking down of barriers between Samaritans and Jews.

The worldview and concerns of the implied author are therefore revealed through the text itself. This is achieved through the various references that are made in the narrative and its message, the way the text is constructed, the characters that are presented, and the words that are used, and so on, to present the story. These all contribute to the background against which the story unfolds, and help us (the real reader) to form the response to it.

Implied reader(s)

The implied reader(s) is/are the counterpart of the implied author. Here we identify the picture of the reader or readers that emerges simply from our study of the text. When we look at what issues and situation the author is trying to address, we can begin to form an outline of who we suspect the author's original intended readers may have been. Every story teller gives clues as to who they are writing to by what details they think the reader already knows (or does not know) when reading the story. For example, in John 6:4 we read: "Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near." This implies that the reader is not likely

to know much about Jewish festivals. We also consider how the author seems to think that the implied reader will react. The assumption is usually made that this reader will respond positively to the text that the author is presenting, whereas the real reader may misunderstand or dismiss the message that is presented in the text.

Related to, but distinct from, the implied author and implied Reader are the narrator and narratee(s).

Real Reader(s): This is the person or persons reading the passage now, that means you! In other words you are seeking to identify your characteristics. Who are you? What is your context, background, what are your values, etc.

Implied Readers: Here we are trying to identify the picture that the author had of the readers to whom s/he was writing. We use clues in the text and story to try to reconstruct an image of the characteristics and context of those whom the author had in mind when writing the narrative.

Special note:

Since the aim of narrative criticism is to understand the story itself, rather than its background, we do not focus further on the real/implied author/reader.

Although those elements are part of the narrative criticism approach, we believe that the elements we discuss from this point onwards are really important. So, in the outline for doing narrative exegesis that we give to you on page 11.24 and in the assignment tasks we set, we leave out the real/implied author/reader.

Narrator.

The narrator is the person within the story who actually tells the story. For example, in the Gospel of John, the narrator is the 'beloved disciple'. In Luke-Acts, while it is by no means undisputed, tradition has believed that it is Luke the physician – for example the so-called "we sections" where Luke himself is present in the activities that are described. See for example Acts 16:10ff: "When he had seen the vision, *we* immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called *us* to proclaim the good news to them..." [NRSV] (See too Acts 20:5ff, 27:1ff).

In many instances we may not be able to name the narrator. What is more important is that we identify the characteristics of the narrator, e.g. whether or not the narrator has unlimited knowledge, knowing even the thoughts of God (omniscient or all-knowing), or is always present (omnipresent), etc.

The narrator is usually regarded as omniscient, in that the narrator may reveal the thoughts of some of the characters that would not be evident to the

Narrator: The narrator is the person who tells the story. The narrator and the author are sometimes the same person but often they are different people. Sometimes the narrator is a character in the story itself. For example, in Deuteronomy, Moses is the narrator. He is telling the story, but scholars agree that Moses is not the author. For those who believe that Luke the physician wrote Luke-Acts, they would say that in Luke-Acts the narrator and the author are the same person. (But not all scholars agree that Luke the physician wrote Luke-Acts). It is not always possible to identify the narrator by name. In such cases the narrator can only be known from looking at the clues from the text itself – how the story is told, what values the narrator shows, what perspective the story is told from.

other characters in the narrative.

When we read of Jesus healing the paralysed man, who was let down through a hole in the roof, the narrator reveals what they were “questioning in their hearts”: “Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Mark 2:6 NRSV).

An instance in which a Narrator does not assume the qualities of someone who is omniscient is in the book of Job, when God confronts Job after Job has begun to question God. God responds in Job 38 with the words: “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? ...Who marked off its dimensions? ...On what were its footings set or who laid its foundation stone?” (Job 38:4-6). In the ensuing verses, the narrator does not provide answers to these questions.

The narrator might recount events in a different order from that in which they actually happened. Events that have happened earlier may be told later in the narrative, because the narrator controls the order of events. When two events happen at the same time, the narrator chooses which event to narrate first for the best effect on the reader.

If the narrator is aware of events happening at the same time as the action that is being described, the narrator is considered to be omnipresent, i.e. present in more than one place at the same time. For example, in the story of Peter’s encounter with Cornelius which is described in Acts 10, the narrator is able to tell us both about the messengers that had been sent to Peter, before they arrived, and also about the vision he was having at the same time.

Another characteristic is whether or not the narrator can be regarded as reliable, in giving an accurate account of the movement of the story.

The narrator chooses a point of view from which to narrate the story. The narrator may choose to tell the story from the perspective of one of the characters, or from his or her own independent point of view. The narrator is therefore seen as the observer of the action.

Another way of putting this is to ask the question: ‘Who is behind the camera?’ Or ‘Who is the camera following?’ If one imagined a scene being shot with a TV camera, the narrator would be the one who is seeing the scene as the camera

does. For example, in the story of Peter and John healing the lame man at the Temple Gate in Acts 3, the narrative is following Peter and John on the way to the Temple, where they come across the lame man. In other words, the camera is following the apostles.

The opposite way would have described the lame man being there and suddenly seeing Peter and John arrive. The TV camera operator would have been with the lame man all the time – not following Peter and John.

The difference between the narrator and the implied author is that the narrator is the one who actively tells the story itself, whereas the implied author is simply in the background of the story. The implied author is revealed through the ideology presented through the story, and through the aim of the narrative.

First, Second and Third Person Narration

A final comment on the Narrator needs to be the distinction between First Second and Third Person narration.

First Person: A narrator who tells a story in the first person tells it as if he or she was present at/participated in the events being described. A first person narrator will tell the story by making comments such as, “I did this... and then I did that”. The narrator is describing things that he or she has done. Sometimes it will be in the plural, “We did this or that...”. There are sections of the book of Acts where the story is told in the first person, using the plural, for example: “Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future...” (Acts 16:16).

Second Person: Second person narration is a very rare form of narration. A narrator who tells a story in the Second Person uses the language of “you”: “You did this, or that...” In this way the writer or story-teller makes the reader feel as though they are a character in the story and participate in what is happening. As stated already, it is a very rarely used form of narration. In the book of Deuteronomy there are places where the writer has begun to use Second Person narration in those sections where Moses addresses the Israelites as “you”. For the reader who has entered into the narrative at times it feels as though Moses is in fact addressing the reader (you):

At that time I said to you, “You are too heavy a burden for me to carry alone. The LORD your God has increased your numbers so that today you are as numerous as the stars in the sky. May the LORD, the God of your ancestors, increase you a thousand times and bless you as he has promised! But how can I bear your problems and your burdens and your disputes all by myself? Choose some wise, understanding and respected men from each of your tribes, and I will set them over you.”

You answered me, “What you propose to do is good.” (Deut 1:9-14 NIV).

Third Person: Third person narration is the most common form of narration. A narrator who tells a story in the third person tells of events that have happened to other people. A third person narration will use phrases like: “She did this or that...”, “They did this or that...”

Telling a story in the third person gives the narrator the greatest freedom and scope in telling the story. A narrator who tells the story in the third person is often omniscient, knowing what other characters are thinking and feeling. This is not possible for a first person narrator, who can only really give details about what they themselves are thinking and feeling because they are telling the story from their own perspective.

The Narratee.

The narratee is the counterpart of the narrator – the person whom the Narrator is addressing. Sometimes, the narratee is identified, as at the beginning of both Luke and Acts, where Theophilus is named. We do not know whether Theophilus was a real person; the name means “lover or friend of God” or “beloved of God”. This might have been a particular person, or it might represent anyone who loves God. Either way, we know that the author of Luke-Acts had a narratee in mind: “Theophilus”.

The Narratee(s)

The narratee(s) are the people, named or unnamed, who are listening to the story being told. From *particular references* in the narrative, we may be told of or led to assume some of their characteristics e.g. they are Jews or Gentiles, etc.

Most narrative books of the bible have no named narratees: the narratees must be inferred from the text.

Sometimes, we have a narrative within a narrative, e.g. when Jesus is narrating a parable. Then we are told whom he is addressing.

An example of this from Acts is in Acts 26, Paul is defending himself before King Agrippa. As he defends himself, he re-tells the story of his conversion. In this section of the story, the character of Paul becomes the Narrator (the character telling the story) while King Agrippa is the Narratee (the one who is listening to Paul tell his story).

Occasionally, the narratee may be linked directly with the narrator as for example in John 1:16 where, in referring to Jesus, the narrator says: "From his fulness, *we* have all received" (NRSV). By saying 'we', the narrator is linking himself with those to whom he is narrating the story.

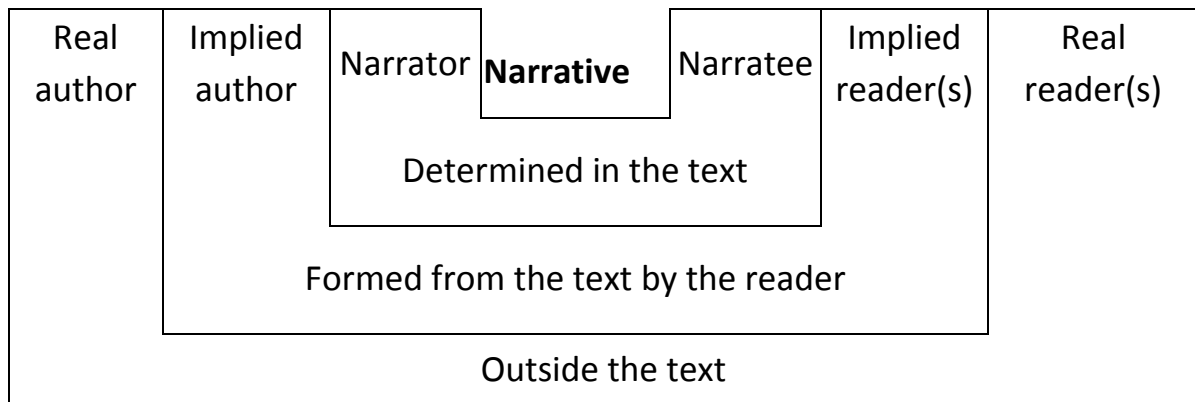
The narratee may be a character (or characters) within the whole narrative or a section of it receiving information from the narrator (who is also possibly a character within the story).

Be careful not to confuse the narratee with the implied reader. The narratee is the person or people envisaged within the text as those receiving the communication from the narrator (as with 'Theophilus'). The implied reader(s) of Luke-Acts are the early Christian community for whom 'Luke' (the implied author) wrote the texts.

Again, when we seek to identify the narratees, as with identifying the narrator, we are not necessarily looking to name them, but to describe their characteristics. Are the narratees Jews or Gentiles, are they rich or poor, religious people or outsiders, etc?

Summary

This diagram sums up this section.



You can see that there are three strands of identification. The real author and reader(s) stand *outside* the text; the implied author and reader(s) are constructed mostly *from* the text by the reader; and the narrator and narratee appear *in* the text itself.

2. Characters.

The second main grouping of components of a narrative that is studied is that of the characters. Characters are usually a person, but may be an animal or some other creature or object (e.g. Balaam's donkey in Numbers 22 or the serpent in Genesis 3), which plays a role in the narrative. In Judges 9 the trees are the characters in the allegorical narrative.

Here we look at how the characters are described, as well as their role in the narrative. This is a key area of narrative criticism, as here we note how the people portrayed in the narrative characters develop and change, or they are simply representative of a static grouping whose outlook is likely to be challenged by the author. Conflict between different players in the narrative is a key factor in this discernment.

Identifying the different kinds of characters enables us to discover the thrust of the narrative. Sometimes the author will describe the personality of the character directly. For example, in Genesis 3:1 we are told that "the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made" (NRSV). At

other times, we have to discern this through the character's interaction with others in the narrative.

Note too that God may appear as a character, either in the narrative itself, or in the background to the story.

We look now at some different character-types that are important for Narrative Criticism.

a) Round Character

A round character is normally well-developed in the narrative and one who experiences transformation. Round characters are characters about whom we have a fairly larger amount of information. In other words, they are more than just a name to us. We know some detail about who they are, and what kind of person they are. A round character is someone in the story who has some depth to their personality, and who has some complexity about them. Like a person in real life, the thinking and actions of a round character are not always easy to predict. Because of this, a round character is capable of change and evolution throughout a story. Zacchaeus, the tax collector, as described in Luke 19, is a good example of such transformation and growth.

<p>Round Character: A round character is one whose personality is revealed in the narrative.</p>

Therefore this character is not always predictable, and may act differently to most of the other characters in the narrative. For example, the Samaritan in Luke's parable does not follow the pattern, that is established through the actions of the priest and the Levite who both "passed by on the other side" (Luke 10:25ff).

Round characters may also show contradictory aspects of their personality. For example, Peter in Matthew 16 acknowledges Jesus as the Christ, and then shortly afterwards goes on to argue with Jesus when he speaks about undergoing suffering and being killed.

Round characters usually act in a way with which the readers may easily identify. They seem authentic and realistic.

b) Flat Character.

Flat Characters: Are characters about whom we know very little, and who do not develop during the narrative.

They do not normally play a key role: for example the servants who help Jesus when he turns the water into wine (John 2:5-8).

Flat characters are one-dimensional. They are characters about whom we have very little information. They lack complexity and realistic personalities. They do not develop in the story, but remain static and unchanged through the course of the narrative. The servant-girl who challenges Peter about knowing Jesus is an example of such a character (Luke 22:56)

These characters may sometimes display strongly defined qualities, but they lack the fullness of a round character. Examples of flat characters may be the disciples and the crowds.

Often, flat characters are not important players in the narrative, except that they may be representative of a group of people. Some scholars of narrative criticism have a separate grouping related to flat characters, which they call “stock characters”. This emphasises that they simply represent a particular viewpoint or group of people.

Stock characters are stereotypes, and are likely to be caricatures (or symbolic representatives) of the groups they represent.

A **stereotype** is a character who represents a fixed, often prejudiced picture of a group of people.

A **caricature** is a representation of a person or group of people, which distorts who they really are by emphasizing one perceived aspect of them.

An example of these is Simon, the Pharisee, in Luke 7:36-50. In verse 36, he is simply described as “one of the Pharisees” before being named in verse 40 (NRSV). John’s Gospel is written in a very symbolic manner. Many of the characters in John’s Gospel could be considered “stock characters” because they stand as symbolic representatives of particular groups. The Samaritan woman at the well, for example, is a symbolic representative of the whole Samaritan nation (John 4). Nicodemus symbolically represents all those who are interested in Jesus, but not fully committed to Him.

There are two other types of character that fall under the general heading of Flat Characters but have a further categorisation. These are Agents and Walk-ons.

b1) Agent

An agent is a flat character who nevertheless has an effect in the narrative. In other words, the agent is not just a bystander. The robbers who attacked the man in the parable of the Good Samaritan are agents (Luke 10:30). They affect the story, but we know nothing else about them.

b2) Walk-on

Walk-on characters are minor players in the narrative. They usually appear for one scene and then do not return. The prophet Anna, who appears in the scene which describes the presentation of Jesus in the Temple, is such a character (Luke 2:36). A walk-on character may speak but does not affect the action in any substantial way. Other examples of walk-on characters are the owner of the donkey used on Palm Sunday, and the owner of the upper room used for the Last Supper.

c) Protagonist.

The protagonist is the chief person in the narrative, and usually drives most of the action. The word “Protagonist” comes from the Greek meaning the first or prime actor, so the protagonist often starts the chain of events. Take careful note of what this character says and does, as the protagonist is central to the meaning which the author wants to communicate in the story. (It is possible at times that the protagonist, as the chief character in the story, may be a negative figure).

<p>Protagonist: Is the main character who initiates most of the action, whether good or bad.</p>

The narrative is usually constructed around this character. The Exodus narrative obviously portrays Moses as a protagonist.

The protagonist is normally a round character. Often we shall find ourselves as readers feeling some considerable empathy for this character.

d) Antagonist.

The antagonist is a character who opposes and disputes with the protagonist. So, as we referred to Moses as the protagonist in the Exodus narrative, the antagonist will be Pharaoh. The antagonist is thus the one who stands in the way of the achievement of the protagonist's goals. The action of this character will expose the strong points and the weaknesses of the protagonist.

Antagonist: The character who opposes the protagonist.

Another example of an antagonist is the leader of the synagogue in Luke 13:14, who protests when Jesus heals the crippled woman.

When the protagonist is acting badly, the antagonist can be the hero of the story. For example, Nathan confronts David with having displeased the Lord through his relationship with Bathsheba and arranging the murder of Uriah (2 Samuel 12). Nathan is clearly the hero of the story.

3. The Way the Narrative Unfolds.

Once we have analysed the characters, we turn our attention to the structure of the story itself. Aspects that we now address are the setting, the plot, and the theme.

Settings.

The various settings within a narrative provide the context for the actions of the characters (Powell 1990:69). There are various components of the setting that the text reveals. These include the geographical setting or locale, and the time, either historical or current.

a) Geographical/Place Setting

The geographical setting tells us where the story is taking place. The geographical setting may reveal important clues as to what is happening in the story. For example, in Luke 17:11 we are told that Jesus was "on his way to Jerusalem", which signifies something about what the reader may know is about to take place there, and the result of the event of the cross. We are also told, "Jesus travelled along the border between Samaria and Galilee" (NIV). A border is a place of meeting. The two neighbouring territories are mentioned, and the

reader is assumed to know something about the attitudes that prevailed between the two groupings.

The setting is preparing the reader for the climax of the story, which is that of the ten lepers who were healed; the only one who returned to give thanks was a Samaritan.

The geographical setting refers not only to a country or region, but also to any physical place, for example, a well, or a crowded room. In Acts 3, Peter and John meet the lame beggar at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple. The setting of beauty throws the poverty of the lame man into stark contrast.

b) The Time Setting

Time references in the story often give a clue to the deeper meaning of the narrative. For example, when Nicodemus comes to see Jesus, we are told that he did so by night (John 21:1). The fact that he came to Jesus at night suggests that he was not wanting his fellow Pharisees to know that he was speaking with Jesus so as to avoid getting himself into trouble. Thus the detail that it was night is important because it helps to contribute to the meaning of what is happening in the story.

At the Last Supper Jesus had declared that someone would betray him, Judas then leaves the company, we are told very simply, "And it was night" (John 13:26 NRSV). Note the contrast with Jesus who has been described as the light of the world (John 8:12).

In John 4, we are told that the woman came to the well to draw water at noon. That detail indicates that she is set apart from the other women of the town who would normally draw water in the early morning and late afternoon. This prepares us for the revelation that she has had five husbands and is now living with another man.

Time references refer not only to the time of day as just mentioned, but the time of year, either in for example the religious calendar (Mark 14:1, "It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread" [NIV]) or the season of the year (summer or winter).

References may also be made to past historical events or experiences that the characters have had (Matthew 16:9, “Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many baskets you gathered?” [NRSV])

c) The Social Setting

Social references in the story often give a clue as to how people are related to each other socially. With regard to social settings we need to ask the following questions: what is the cultural context for what emerges in this episode? What knowledge is the reader assumed to possess concerning, class structures, economic systems, social customs, and the like? How does this information affect the interpretation of this particular episode within the context of the narrative as a whole? These questions will sometimes reveal divisions present in the society and conditions that they were living in, for example slavery, or a famine stricken country.

In the book of Ruth a series of verses (1:1, 2, 6, 22) focus on the conditions of the life in the countryside of Bethlehem and Moab which are in the throes of famine. When Naomi and Ruth return to Bethlehem the narrator paints a picture of the social life which prevails at that time between masters and farm workers (2:4-9). Although the poor are given permission to glean behind the harvesters (Leviticus 19:9-10) in reality things worked differently. “The general context evokes a risk of contempt, harassment or violence” (Marguerat and Bourquin 1999:82).

The meal is one of the most common and significant social settings in the New Testament. Table fellowship implied acceptance of the social values and status of others (Resseguie 2005:110-111). The circumstances around the setting of a meal in Luke 7:36-50 are unlike those meals enjoyed by readers today. Jesus criticises the host for not washing his feet, kissing him and anointing his head with oil. Unless there is an understanding of the social etiquette around the sharing of a meal in first century Palestine one would miss the fact that such lapses of hospitality imply a lack of love and or even respect for the visitor. A woman enters the house and weeps at the feet of Jesus and then proceeds to dry his feet with her hair and anoints him with expensive oil. A modern reader is unlikely to understand not only the revulsion felt about a sinful woman interrupting a dinner party and behaving as she did before a guest of the host

but also the fact that Jesus was reclining at the table (she was able to get to his feet easily since they were not under the table), without some understanding of the social customs of that time (Powell 1990:75).

d) The Religious Setting:

A religious content can appear in various forms within a narrative:

- As a character presented directly or indirectly as religious or non-religious in regard to his/her identity, character traits, opinions, experiences, emotions, behaviour.
- As a direct or indirect reference to religious beliefs, rituals, places or buildings within the narrative.
- Or the narrative can also be used to convey a religious message (Finnern 2014: np).

Religious days and festivals (Sabbath, Passover, Tabernacles) are settings for healings and conflicts between Jesus and the religious authorities. In Luke 13:10-17 Jesus heals the crippled woman on the Sabbath because the Sabbath was not intended to prevent works of necessity or mercy; after all it was the day set aside for the God of Mercy (Barton 2001:313).

Nicodemus appears three times in John's gospel; his second appearance is a religious setting (John 7:50-52). The setting of this narrative takes place during the festival of the Booths (Tabernacles). The narrator uses this opportunity to show Nicodemus in a better light – having insisted on meeting Jesus under the cover of night he is now prepared to challenge the Pharisees.

Religious festivals such as the Passover strengthen important events in the ministry of Jesus. The Passover celebrates God's deliverance of his people from bondage in Egypt. In John, Jesus is the 'lamb of God' (1: 29, 36) who is sacrificed at the time the Passover lamb is slaughtered (19:14, 31). To ensure that the reader does not miss the importance of this religious setting the narrator slows the narration down. While John 1-12 covers the first two and a half years of Jesus' ministry, John 13-19 only covers twenty-four hours. Luke uses repetition to reinforce the importance of the Passover and Unleavened Bread (see Luke 22:1, 7, 8, 11, 13, 15; Resseguie 2005:113).

The Plot

In this area, we analyse the way the story develops. This means focusing on the sequence of the events that make up the narrative, and the characters who help to move the plot forward. Events may be vital to the advancement of the plot, or they may simply be extra events that do not vitally affect the narrative.

Plot – The sequence of events that unfolds in the story.

The Five phases of Plot development

- 1. Initial Situation** – How the story starts.
- 2. Rising Action** – How the problem unfolds and often gets worse.
- 3. Transforming Action** – the action that brings about the change and the turning point.
- 4. Resolution** – this is the moment in the story when the problem or conflict is resolved.
- 5. Final Situation** – how the story ends.

The plot is the way the narrative unfolds through the events that are related. The plot, then, first of all involves the provision of **an initial situation** (how the story starts). Then comes the **rising action**, where a problem/issue arises. The **transforming action** changes the situation so that the problem or deficit can be resolved. The transforming action prepares the reader for the moment when the action will be turned around. From that point, we can begin to see how the story will be worked out. The **resolution** is moment when the situation is resolved. The **final situation** describes how the story ends.

We shall now look at the story of the woman with the haemorrhage as we find it in Mark 5:24b-34.

We are told of the crowd that follows Jesus (the initial situation). The woman is described as one who has visited physicians fruitlessly (the rising action). She has heard of Jesus and resolves to touch his cloak. The action revolves around this crucial event, which is the moment when the action turns around (transforming action). Jesus then engages with his disciples and their lack of perception is a vital part of the plot (the further complication). Finally, Jesus engages with the woman and this event resolves the story (resolution) as she is nurtured into the open and her faith affirmed (final situation).

The text may emphasise the thrust of the narrative and the development of the plot in a number of ways. One of these is how the passage of time is described.

Time

In Narrative Criticism, we use two different terms to deal with the concept of Time. They are **Narrated Time** and **Narrative Time**.

Narrated Time is simply the description of how much time has passed, or what time it is. For example, see “six days later” (Matthew 17:1 NRSV) or “none o’clock in the morning (Acts 2:15 NRSV).

In the parable of The Workers in the Vineyard in Matthew 20, we read that the landowner went out at the third hour, and again in the sixth hour and the ninth hour, and then again in the eleventh hour. The narrator is telling the audience how long this story is taking. The amount of time worked by the first hirelings compared to the last is critical to understanding the parable. This is the Narrated Time.

Narrative Time relates to how much time is taken in the text to describe an incident. Events that take up a large portion of the text usually indicate the importance given to those events in the narrative. It is as if the author had slowed things down to help us focus on the details in the narrative, rather than skipping over them quickly.

Mark uses ten chapters in his gospel to describe the whole of Jesus’ ministry (covering about three years), and then spends another six chapters recounting the last week of Jesus’ life. The pace of the narrative slows drastically and the detail increases to emphasise the importance of that section of the narrative.

On the other hand, events that are not seen as important are often described quickly. For example, in Mark 5:21, we are told that Jesus crossed over the Sea of Galilee and the description of the whole trip takes just a few words. But we know that the actual crossing would have taken a few hours. The crossing is only important to move the characters from one place to another, from Gentile territory to Jewish territory where he will meet Jairus. The crossing serves to link

Narrated Time: This is the record of the time that has passed e.g. the third hour, the sixth hour, or “six days later”.

Narrative Time: How the passing of time is described, whether quickly or slowly. Events that are described quickly and in passing are likely to be less important than events that are described in more detail and that take longer.

the previous event with the next event. But the crossing itself, what happened in the boat, is unimportant.

Narrative time also affects the speed of a narrative. When a lot of things happen quickly with little detail given, with little dialogue in between, the narrative moves along quickly and the reader is caught up in the speed of the narrative. But the author could also slow the narrative down by added detail, by repeating statements, by having the characters speak more. Not only does this move the reader from unimportant to important stuff quickly, but it affects the reader emotionally. The speed of the narrative can make a reader excited, anxious or fearful. Or the speed of the narrative can calm the reader down, make him/her feel at ease and peaceful.

Unlike narrated time, narrative time does not necessarily follow the order in which the events happened. An earlier event may only be narrated at the end of the narrative, leaving the reader uninformed and guessing why the characters are behaving the way they do. This creates tension.

An event which occurred at the end of the story may be narrated early in the narrative to foreshadow what happens in between. This makes the reader try to fill in the space between the early events and the last event from their own experience and imagination. This draws a reader into the story.

In real life, hundreds of events happen at the same time in different places. For example, in one ward of the hospital a baby is born, while in another ward a grandmother dies at the same time. The author can only tell about one event at a time, and then the other. This sequence in which the author introduces the events changes the meaning of the narrative. This sequence can make one character more important, or it can cast one character as more central than another.

In summation, the order in which events are narrated, the amount of “space” given to an event or character and the speed of the narrative are tools authors use to influence the way their narrative affects the reader. These are all parts of narrative time.

A further clue in the development of the plot is in the **order in which the characters are introduced**. The key character in a narrative may be the first to appear. For example, in the account of the creation in Genesis 2, humankind is introduced first “when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up” (Genesis 2:5 NRSV).

Other characters will be subordinate. In 2 Samuel 13 Absalom is introduced first, even though Amnon is his older brother. This is because the narrative is essentially about Absalom.

However, the author might use a different technique and build to the introduction of the key character as the climax of the narrative. For example, when Samuel goes to Jesse to identify the one whom the Lord is calling to be the king, all of Jesse’s other sons are paraded before him. The high point of the story is when David appears last and is anointed as the future king (1 Samuel 16:1-13).

<p>Repetition: usually indicates that something is important.</p>	
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Another of the clues that the text may give concerning the aim of the author is the **repetition of something** that has already been described.

Genesis has several of these. In Genesis 1, the words describing God seeing creation and describing it as “good” run like a thread through the narrative. We might note, too, that the narrative begins in verse 1 with the same three words that appear at the end of the second story of creation in Genesis 2:4a “created”, “heavens” and “earth”. They frame the two creation accounts and emphasise the message.

It is very important to note that sometimes there may be **situations that are not resolved**. It may be that the text reveals these as being left deliberately unresolved as a challenge to the reader to think through the issues raised, or they may be left unresolved as a point that the text presents about the nature of life.

Identifying all the parts of the plot helps us to draw out the fullness of meaning of the narrative.

The Theme.

Finally we come to the theme. The steps described above, and the constituent parts of the process of narrative criticism, bring us finally to the overarching or encapsulating theme – the unifying idea of the text. Through this, we can determine more clearly how the author hoped that the readers would respond to the text.

Theme: the unifying idea, purpose, or meaning of the text to which the reader is invited to respond.

Conclusion.

Narrative criticism is a method of analysing text by paying attention to the constituent parts and structure of the text in order to discern the meaning of the text. In other words, we are attempting to determine what effect the narrative is intended to have on its readers. What is the author trying to achieve in the implied reader? That is what we take by coming to the text using this method, and it is that to which we seek to respond as we apply the text to our life situation.

An advantage of Narrative Criticism is that it enables any reader to engage directly with the text. Methods like historical criticism imply a great deal of scholarly knowledge that is necessary for understanding the text, and therefore seemed to make sound exegesis a task beyond the ordinary reader. For this reason, narrative criticism is a useful tool for Christians who take a different stance on historical critical issues, but can nevertheless engage with the text together.

A disadvantage is that narrative criticism treats the text as if it is a uniform narrative, whereas form and redaction criticism show that, for example, the gospels are collections of texts that circulated in various forms before being worked into a coherent narrative.

This criticism (and others) does not invalidate narrative criticism, nor does it mean that we have to choose between these methods. Each has its value and each can contribute to our understanding of the text. This means that there are different ways of drawing forth meaning from the text. In our coming to scripture, we are able to draw from a range of different critical methods in exegeting the text.

An outline for doing narrative exegesis:

List the characters under the following categories:

Round:

Flat:

Agents:

Walk-on:

Then identify the following:

Protagonist:

Antagonist:

The narrator: Who (what type of person) is actually telling the story? (Remember that naming the person isn't as important as describing the characteristics of the narrator.)

The narratee: To whom is the narrator addressing the story? (What kind of person/people?)

List aspects of the setting under the following headings. Once you have done so, comment on their significance for the development of the story.

Geographical setting: Region, place, etc

Religious setting: religious authorities, Holy places, rituals, religious seasons/festivals, etc.

Social setting: Social and cultural values, social structures, etc.

Time setting: Time of day, year, religious calendar, etc.

Now outline how the plot is developed:

The initial situation

The rising action

The transforming action

The resolution

The final situation

Narrative time: The development of the action: Order of characters, speed of action, conflicts, repetition, etc.

The theme: Now spell out what emerges as the key theme of the text – i.e., what seems to have been the intention of the narrative. After considering how the readers were intended to respond, reflect on how you are being challenged to respond to the narrative.

An Example of Narrative Criticism applied to Mark 2:1-12

Outline for Doing Narrative Exegesis:

List the Characters under the following categories:

Round:

Jesus

Flat:

(a) Agents:

*Those described as “some people” who brought the paralysed man to Jesus
The scribes (as their “thoughts” give rise ultimately to the healing of the man).
They are also stock characters, representing the reaction of Jewish authorities to Jesus.*

(b) Walk-ons:

Paralysed man

The crowd

God, who can forgive (v7) and who is glorified (v12)

Then select the following:

Protagonist:

Jesus

Antagonist:

The scribes

The Narrator: Who (what type of person) is actually telling the story? (Remember that naming the person isn't as important as describing the characteristics of the narrator).

The Narrator is depicted as omniscient in that s/he knows the unspoken thoughts of the scribes. The narrator is also omnipresent in that s/he knows what is happening in the room where Jesus is speaking and also that the people

bringing the paralysed man have been unable to enter and have had to make a hole in the roof. The narrator's point of view is from the perspective of those carrying the paralysed man, even giving detail about them having dug through the roof.

The Narratee: Whom is the Narrator addressing in the story? (What kind of person/people?)

The Narratees are unnamed but seem to have an understanding of Jewish theology in that the narrator does not have to explain the supposed link between sickness and sin. They would also believe that only God can forgive sin and that it is not remedied by having some secret knowledge (Gnosticism).

List aspects of The Setting under the following headings. Once you have done so, make comments on their significance for the development of the story:

Geographical (physical) setting: (Region, place, etc.)

Capernaum (which is a town in Galilee, an orthodox Jewish region)

Time Setting: (Time of day, year, religious calendar, etc.)

Presumably daytime.

Now seek to outline how The Plot is developed:

The initial situation:

Jesus is teaching the crowd. There is a man that is paralysed, and the crowd blocks his way to Jesus.

The rising action:

Some people bring the paralysed man, and being unable to get close because of the crowd, make a hole in the roof and let the man down.

The transforming action:

Jesus pronounces forgiveness, and the scribes then react to the point where Jesus' statement needs to be verified by some action.

Resolution:

Jesus tells the man who has been let down through the roof to stand up and go home, and he does. Note that the man who has been “let down” as in a burial, is told to “stand up” as in resurrection.

The final situation:

The teachers of the law are refuted by the action and the crowd is left in amazement.

Narrative time: (The development of the action: Order of characters, speed of action, conflicts, repetition, etc.)

The first five verses set the scene for Jesus’ confrontation with the teachers of the law. The story then slows down as the narrator spends the next five verses (6-10) focussing on the controversy between Jesus and the teachers of the law over the issue of forgiveness. By so doing the narrator allows the reader to understand that Jesus’ authority to forgive us our sins, is the central issue of this narration as opposed to the physical healing of the paralytic.

The Theme (Now spell out what emerges as the key theme (meaning or lesson) of the text, i.e. what seems to have been the intention of the narrative. After considering how the readers were intended to respond, consider how you are being challenged to respond to the narrative)

Jesus is presented as the one who can forgive. As one can forgive sin only if it is against oneself, the paralysed man’s sins must be construed as being against Jesus, as all sin is also against God; therefore Jesus is being portrayed as the one who is indeed the divine Son of God. With sin removed, God initiates the start of new life now.

I am being challenged about knowing Jesus as the one who supremely forgives; that says something, not only about my own seeking of and obtaining forgiveness, but also about how I proclaim Jesus as the Forgiving One, because Jesus is divine; that also says something about my need to forgive others. Finding forgiveness is an essential part of the new life we are offered in Christ.

Chapter 12

Rhetorical Criticism

Unlike hermeneutical tools such as narrative criticism or even source criticism, rhetoric is much older and goes back at least to the time of Aristotle (circa 322 BC) and the ancient Greeks. For many centuries rhetoric formed a central part of classical education, where the two other main components were logic and grammar. The reason rhetoric was, and may still be viewed as important, is that speakers who can speak well have the power to influence decisions, sometimes even to change the mind of nations.

When we hear the word “rhetoric” today, we probably hear it in connection with a politician who has used *strong* rhetoric in an argument in parliament. A day or two before I wrote this, President Zuma stood in parliament and wanted to rebuke the members of parliament for the way they had been squabbling the previous day. If President Zuma had simply told them they were misbehaving like children, they would have scoffed at his rebuke, because his own behaviour has been questionable. So instead he used rhetoric. He told parliament that he had brought some elderly guests to parliament, and when the members of parliament started to squabble, one of his guests was so shocked and disappointed that she stood up and left the meeting. By the quiet murmurings around the room, you could hear that the members of parliament had been humbled by what was said. By using rhetoric, their opinions had been changed, and in future their behaviour would be affected too.

Rhetoric is the art of making speeches. While the correct use of words and grammar is important to rhetoric, the focus is on the effect a speech has on the people who hear the speech. The quality of rhetoric is measured by seeing how effective the speech is in changing the attitudes, beliefs or actions of the hearers. This discipline seeks to determine how texts are constructed in order to influence readers. It is “the study of the means whereby an author seeks to convince or persuade reader to accept a particular point of view” (Moyise 1998: 57).

Types of Rhetorical Speech

In classical rhetoric there were three types of rhetorical speeches which were designed for different settings within society: Forensic, Deliberative and Epideictic.

Forensic Speeches

The first type is the forensic speech which was the type of rhetoric used in law courts. This rhetoric focuses both on attacking the opponent and defending the rhetor's position. Forensic rhetoric focuses on acts which took place in the past in order to come to a judgement on whether they were right or wrong, just or unjust, moral or immoral. This kind of rhetoric is found in apologetics. Some preachers present sermons as if they were in a court room, often with God as their client and any number of enemies as their opponents. This style of preaching is filled with accusation, blame, shame and judgement.

Deliberative Speeches

Deliberative rhetoric is the type of speech used in political meetings, originally used in the democratic assemblies of Greece. The content and focus of these speeches is future policies, and argues whether they will be to the advantage or disadvantage of the people who will be affected by them. Often these speeches were offered by the leaders of the city, to either give advice to those who were about to vote, or to offer their personal agreement and consent to one of the decisions which would be voted on. As the Roman Empire had abandoned democracy, deliberative rhetoric was no longer used to persuade potential voters in public assemblies. It was however used when Rome sent ambassadors to other nations to establish agreements. So while forensic rhetoric looks at the past, deliberative rhetoric looks at the future.

The fact that deliberative rhetoric is predominantly used in the New Testament reveals something of the rhetors point of view. It reveals that the rhetors believed that their audience were free to choose how they responded. As a show of respect, the rhetors use clear arguments to persuade rather than using manipulation or force to sway the audience. Paul's choice of deliberative rhetoric shows he understood the Church to be the new democratic assembly

where people could debate, discuss and dialogue. This is a clear contrast to the Roman Empire where people simply had to do what they were told by those with authority.

Epidictic Speeches

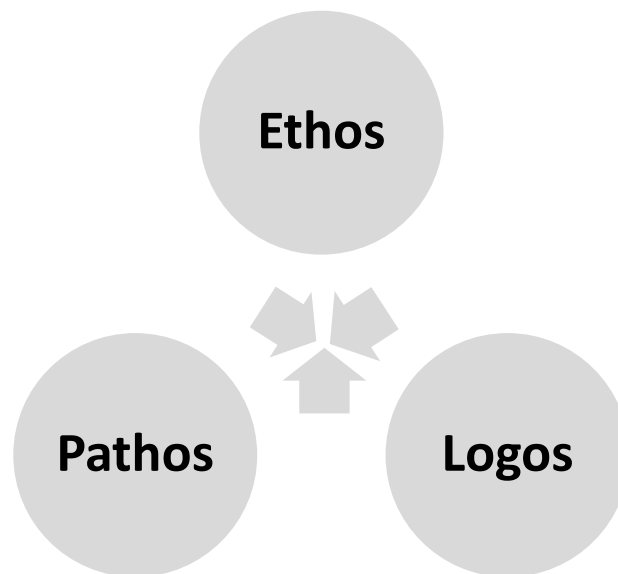
Originally epideictic rhetoric were speeches given at funerals which discussed the character of the person who had died. These were usually in the form of eulogies which shared the good aspects of the person's life. The purpose of these speeches was not looking back though, like a forensic speech. Rather these speeches focussed on lessons and principles which could be learnt from the past and applied in the present. For this reason Aristotle argued that epideictic speeches focussed on the present and how we conduct ourselves here and now. This means that the audience would be challenged about what type of behaviour was honourable, and what was shameful. Because of this initial purpose in epideictic rhetoric, over time epideictic rhetoric became the form of rhetoric used for teaching and preaching. Epideictic rhetoric was the genre most commonly used by the Sophistic tradition, and in Paul's day a person would regularly be delighted by the epideictic speeches given in market places (agora) and at other gatherings like wealthy citizens birthday parties. An epideictic speech could either praise or blame a person or group of people, but usually it did not try to change people's beliefs. Rather it sought to reinforce what was already believed by the hearers. An eloquent Sophistic rhetor could become quite wealthy, being paid to entertain others at gatherings through speeches, even in theatres.

Within a rhetorical speech the rhetor was not compelled to stick to one type of rhetoric, but was able to move from one type to another and back again. An example of this is 1 Corinthians, where Paul digresses from what is generally a deliberative genre to an epideictic praise of love.

In the Roman Empire, Sophistic rhetors who used epideictic rhetoric were able to win the favour of the powerful leaders, the most powerful was the emperor. Witherington (2009: 14) calls this the "art of *sucking up*... in which people were not speaking truth to power."

The emotive phases of rhetoric

Three aspects may be identified in an attempt to motivate hearers. The writer seeks to engage the sympathies of the readers (the *ethos*). An appeal is made to the emotions (the *pathos*). Logical argument is brought into play (the *logos*). A normal rhetorical speech act would first appeal to ethos, then to logos and finally to pathos.



To start with a rhetor would try to make the audience feel at ease by appealing to surface emotions, such as feeling friendly or welcome. Rhetors would often use laughter and humour to help their audience feel relaxed and to build rapport. In this emotional phase, the rhetor would usually try to establish their own authority as a person who should be listened to on the given subject.

Consider the opening lines of Galatians. Paul opens by saying, “Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—² and all the brothers with me, To the churches in Galatia: ³ Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴ who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, ⁵ to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.” (NIV)

How does that opening make you feel emotionally?

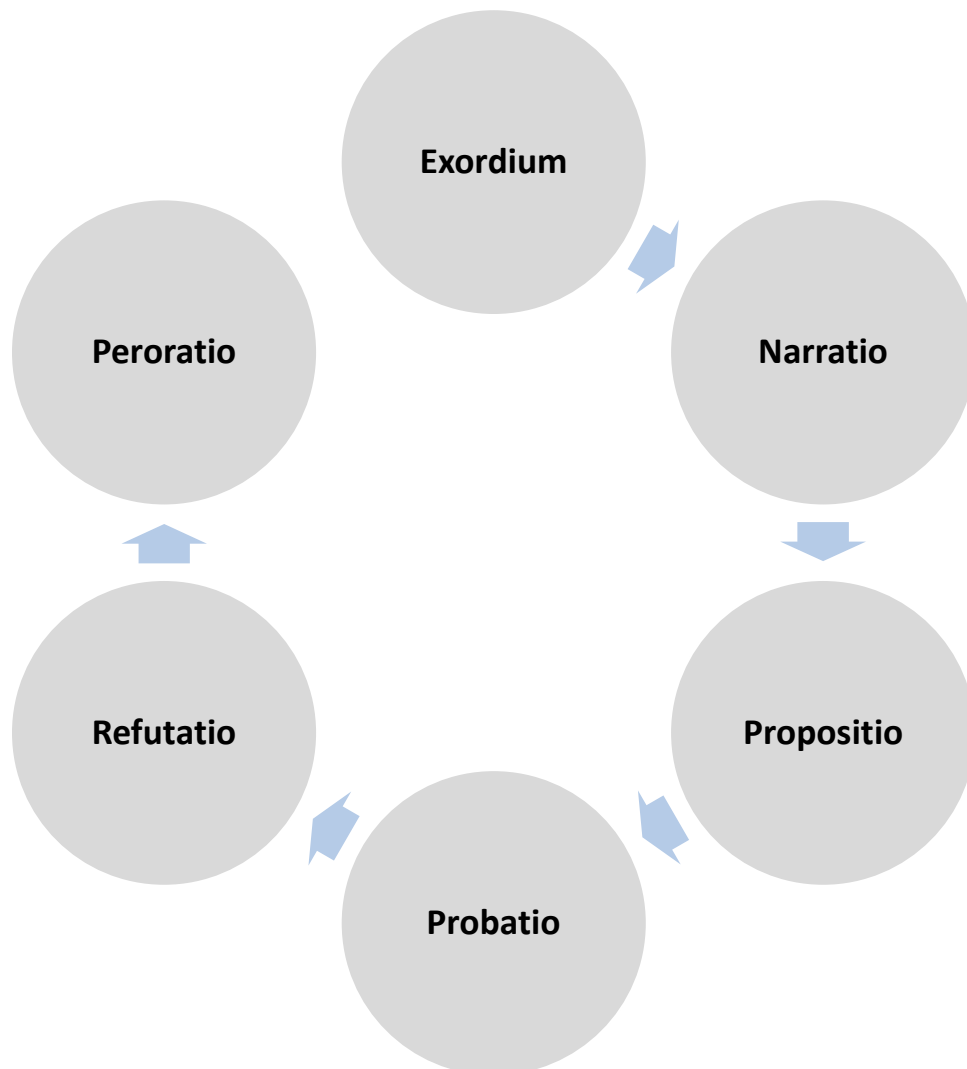
Paul is appealing to ethos. He is establishing his authority as an apostle so that his audience will trust that he has the authority to speak on the issues he is about to raise. Paul then goes on to extend hospitality to help his audience to relax and open up to what he has to say. In a sense the ethos phase of a speech is where the rhetor attempts to bring the audience onto his / her side, to get them facing in the same direction as him/her so that they can move forward together. An unskilled rhetor will fail to establish this bond with the audience, and they will listen with suspicion because they are not convinced about the speaker's character. There are many factors which can affect a rhetor's ethos. A speaker who starts his speech late, or who has dressed poorly or whose appearance is untidy may lose their audience at the start. Ethos is also highly contextual and depends on the local norms and customs. A speaker who tells a joke which has a slight sexual overtone or who passes a remark about a certain race group may never be trusted by the audience.

The second emotive phase is logos, which is the real nuts and bolts of the argument. This part of the rhetorical speech is usually quite intense and filled with emotive tension. In this emotional phase the gloves come off and the rhetor speaks frankly. In this phase the rhetor will move away from trying to make the audience like and trust him / her. Instead he or she will start to "trade" off the trust and rapport that was built up in the ethos phase and will make statements and present arguments which make people start to feel uncomfortable. The audience will continue to trust the rhetor to the extent to which his credibility was proved in the ethos phase.

Finally the speech moves to pathos, which appeals to the deep emotions of the audience. It is not enough to convince an audience of the facts; a rhetor needs to get the audience to become emotionally aroused to anger, compassion, joy or pity for them to go beyond being hearers of the words, to become doers of the words. In this phase, with the audiences' intellect being satisfied by the logos, the rhetor moves the audience to react out of emotion and respond with action. In this way a rhetor wins over the audience mind, body and soul.

The Six Stages of a Rhetorical Speech

A classical rhetorical speech is usually structured in six stages of argumentation. While these can sometimes be moved around, or even a stage left out, those are exceptions rather than the norm.



The first stage of a rhetorical speech is the *exordium* which is found at the start of the speech. This coincides with the ethos phase, and is designed to make the audience feel at ease and willing to listen to what will follow.

The second stage is the *narratio* which starts to explain what the speech is about. The *narratio* outlines (narrates) the brief history that brought the rhetor to this point of making the argument, and may outline some brief facts which will be relevant to the topic in order to build interest. There are times when the *narratio* is left out of a rhetorical speech, usually to keep the speech shorter in

cases where the audience may lose patience. During the *narratio* the rhetor will continue to build the ethos.

The *propositio* is the next stage in which the thesis statement (the proposition) is made and the rhetor employs the emotion filled *logos*. In the case of forensic rhetoric, which is the rhetoric used in the court room, the *propositio* will outline the main arguments of both the prosecutor and the defendant in contrast to each other. In modern films a prosecutor may outline her case and at the same time say something like, “The defendant’s lawyer will argue that there was no way that he could have murdered his ex-wife, because he was sleeping at the time she was killed”. In this way the rhetor tries to undermine the opposing rhetor before they get a chance to make their argument.

Next comes the *probatio* where the rhetor goes into the details which were outlined in the *propositio*. As in the *propositio*, this stage is in the *logos* emotive phase which stirs up the audiences emotions with the reasons for the argument. In the *probatio* the rhetor will systematically spell out all the arguments. These arguments will often start with topics which are commonly agreed upon between the rhetor and the audience. These serve as common ground from which to move. From this starting point the rhetor will move onto disputed topics and systematically give reasons for his or her perspective on those topics.

The fifth stage is the *refutatio* in which the rhetor disproves the arguments that the opposition would argue against them. In the *refutatio* the rhetor systematically nullifies and disproves each and every one of those arguments. The rhetor is still appealing to logos, but even so these arguments are loaded with emotive tension. The rhetor does not yet want to move into the deep, volatile emotions of pathos, because the *refutatio* must still appeal to the audiences’ intellect and not just their emotions. We as biblical scholars should not look for these deep arguments near the start of a Pauline epistle as Paul takes the time and effort to move through the various stages in order, building his argument as he goes. Paul only engages in the *refutatio* in Galatians 4 or Romans 9 – 11.

Let us pause for moment to listen to Paul's opening lines to Romans 9.

I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit—² I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh.⁴ They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises;⁵ to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. Romans 9: 1 – 5 (NIV)

Paul restates his ethos by saying, “I am speaking the truth, I am not lying”. He continues by expressing his deep emotion and claiming that he would rather suffer than see his fellow Jews suffering. He then starts on the common place topics by stating all the blessings and honours that should belong to Israel. At this point you can almost hear his audience shouting, “Hallelujah”. But as the argument progresses (v6 ff), Paul starts to refute the claim of certain groups of people. He argues that not all the descendants of Abraham are Jews. He one by one removes and reduces Judaism, removing the descendants of Hagar, then Esau and eventually saying at the time of Exile, only the remnant would be saved. All this time you can imagine the audience nodding their agreement, saying, “Yes Paul, you are right, preach it brother.”

But as the audience is caught up in the emotion, Paul says that the Israelites failed to believe, they failed to practice faith and rather relied on Law, and the only salvation is Jesus. The ultimate rhetorical turn is when Paul states that Gentiles are being saved while Jews are missing out on salvation.

All the way through the audience has been agreeing with Paul's logic and have been caught up in the logos, until they find they cannot go back.

The final stage of a rhetorical speech is the *peroratio* which draws together all the arguments and conclusions, and often singles out one or two main points and raises them emotionally by employing *pathos* in order to move the audience from head knowledge and agreement to emotional commitment and action.

You can feel the emotion as Paul draws Galatians to a close.

Galatians 5 ¹⁹ The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. (NIV)

In this passage Paul draws on deeper emotions as he appeals to pathos to move his audience in their beliefs and their behaviour. As you read these words out loud, you probably find your emotions rising as you recount the acts of the sinful nature. You probably then feel your emotions swinging the other way as you read out the fruit of the Spirit.

Cicero said that the 3 functions of rhetoric are to persuade, to teach and to delight (Lawrie 2005:136). When a rhetor is finished with their rhetorical speech, the audience should be able to say that they have been persuaded to change their beliefs and their actions. They should be able to say that they have learnt something new which they did not know or understand before. Lastly the audience should be able to say that they have been delighted, that the speech was captivating (not boring) and that they were drawn into the speech intellectually and emotionally. Sadly in many church traditions preachers are taught not to engage their audience emotionally, or to appeal to their own ethos in persuading their listeners. This often means that preachers become dull and boring, and even worse, unconvincing and non-persuasive speakers.

Exegetical Questions that Rhetorical Criticism Asks:

1. How does the writer engage the sympathies of the reader(s) for him or herself? This is based on how the writer is able to convince the reader(s) of his or her credibility and is described as the “ethos”.
2. How does the writer appeal to emotion? This is described as the “pathos”.
3. How is logical argument used? Does the argument hold together? This is called “logos”.
4. How is the text structured and how effective is the structure in achieving its purpose?
5. How effective is the language and literary style of the writer in furthering the argument? This requires identifying things like figures of speech, irony (the man with a plank in his eye trying to remove a speck in another’s eye), metaphors and similes, rhetorical questions and other patterns in the text.
6. Does the text require the reader to make a judgement, a decision, or to adopt a particular position on an issue?
7. Finally, the whole unit is evaluated in relation to the rhetorical situation. How successful has the writer been in accomplishing the addressing of the rhetorical situation?

Analyzing the Rhetoric of Stephen's Speech

George Kennedy provides a model for analysing rhetorical speeches. He says we should:

- 1) Identify the rhetorical unit
 - 2) Define the rhetorical situation and the overriding rhetorical problem
 - 3) Determine the species of rhetoric (types of rhetorical speech) used
 - 4) Analyse the arrangement, invention and style of the material unit
 - 5) Evaluate the rhetorical effectiveness of the rhetorical unit.
- (Harvey 1998: 31)

Below we will analyse the speech given by Stephen in Acts 7, and try to complete all five of Kennedy's tasks. While Stephen no doubt was an early Hellenic Christian who died as a martyr in Jerusalem and presented an oral argument before his death, we need to remember that Luke was not present at Stephen's 'trial' or stoning. This means that what is presented as Stephen's speech, written down by Luke approximately fifty years after the actual event, had lived for decades in an oral form. Furthermore, the final form is probably more the product of Luke's construction than it would be Stephen's actual speech. It would have been exceptional for Stephen to construct such a spectacular piece of rhetoric extemporarily, and even more amazing for people to have remembered it exactly. As a product of Luke's work, this record of Stephen's speech is probably much shorter than Stephen's actual speech. If you read it through, you will notice that the entire speech lasts a few minutes in real time. Luke has distilled Stephen's speech to a concise argument full of power, deliberately choosing to include and emphasise the points which would serve his rhetorical purposes.

Rhetorical situation is an event or occasion where that specific context prompts/triggers the rhetorical response. Such an occasion usually carries with it both a sense of urgency and a promise that through writing/speaking, a composer can bring about a change to that situation (Kennedy 1984:35).

Overriding rhetorical problem: The attempt to persuade usually implies some resistance. This could include a situation where the audience is prejudiced against the speaker/writer and/or message, and is not willing to listen to him/her. Or the audience might not perceive him/her as having any authority over them. Or what he/she wishes to say is complicated and too hard to follow (Kennedy 1984:36).

Identifying the rhetorical unit

Stephen's speech is a rhetorical argument which is a part of a much larger rhetorical argument, namely the books of Acts. Stephen's speech is included by Luke precisely because it contributes to Luke's larger argument. Luke's introduction of Stephen starts at the beginning of Acts 6 with the complaint from the Hellenic widows. The pericope dealing with Stephen's speech ends as he is dying, being stoned to death, and in that crisis he cried out to God.

Stephen's speech begins at Acts 7:2b and concludes at the end of Acts 7:53. What follows, although containing words spoken by Stephen, does not form a part of Stephen's speech, but rather of Luke's greater rhetorical speech act. Luke takes Stephen's speech up into his greater argument or purpose for his writing.

Stephen's speech relies heavily on what were considered by his audience to be rock solid sources of truth, namely the Septuagint. Stephen strings together sections of scripture as the skeleton on which he constructs his proofs. Within the speech there are in the region of twelve quotes or references to Old Testament texts.

Diagrammatically, the structure of the speech may look like this:



Section A – Acts 6 - 7:2a

Section B – Acts 7:2b – 7:53

Section C – Acts 7:54 – 7:60

The lightly shaded area represents the over-arching work of Acts. Sections A and C represent Luke's narrative which form the two bookends around Stephen's speech (Section B). Section A prepares the audience for Stephen's speech, establishing ethos and rhetorical situation, and Section C is Luke's account of what happens to Stephen.

Defining the rhetorical situation

Acts 6: 8 – 15 gives us the background to this speech. Stephen has been used by God, and so Jews from the Synagogue of the Freedmen oppose Stephen, and when their opposition fails, they arrange an accusation to be brought that Stephen has blasphemed against Moses and the Temple. This complaint was escalated to the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. Put simply, Stephen was put on trial. That background should give us a clue as to the type of rhetoric we will find in Stephen's speech. These are very serious allegations, and since Stephen was executed for blasphemy, Luke needs to redeem Stephen's honour, and the honour of the Christians.

Read Stephen's speech in Acts 7. What type of rhetorical speech do you think this is?

- Epideictic
- Forensic
- Deliberative

Why do you think Stephen's speech is that kind of speech?

Determining the species of rhetoric used

Before Luke presents Stephen's speech to us, he uses at least two devices to predispose us towards Stephen. Luke wants us to take Stephen's side and to trust him. The first device Luke uses is to tell us that the members of the synagogue arranged the witnesses to discredit Stephen. Stephen does not try to defend against this in his speech, which means it is likely that Luke includes this only as a rhetorical device.

The emotive area of rhetoric where honour and character are dealt with is *Ethos*. So as Luke's rhetorical second intervention is meant to work towards redeeming Stephen's honour, Luke states that "All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel." (Luke 6: 15 NIV) Luke is declaring that contrary to the accusations of the false witnesses, God has shown his approval of Stephen. You

will recall that those whose faces had shone with the glory of God were those who were close to God and spent time in the presence of God. The first example which comes to mind is Moses, who came down from Sinai with his face glowing after meeting with the Lord. So in declaring that Stephen's face shone, Luke is linking and aligning Stephen to the very person he is accused of blaspheming. Luke has defended the claim against Stephen, positioning Stephen to speak from a position of honour, at least to Theophilus. If Luke did not do this, the hearers would listen to Stephen's speech, suspecting that this man is a blasphemer who deserved to die.

Stephen is not criticising the Law, nor is he presenting an apology to defend himself. He is not on the defensive, but rather on the attack. Stephen's speech is a *Forensic Speech* which is the type of speech used in a court room. Rather than being the defence attorney as we would expect since Stephen is the one accused and the one who at the end is condemned to death, Stephen's speech is that of a prosecutor who is laying a charge against the ungodliness of people.

It is important to notice that the audience listening to Stephen is hostile towards him, and so a long *narratio* is required to convince the audience to even listen to this man they suspect of blasphemy. Stephen needs to establish common ground to which the audience will nod their heads in agreement, before he can challenge their deeper perceptions.

We will now analyse the speech in its five sections.

Acts 7: 2 - 53

Exordium: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me!" (Acts 7: 2a NIV)

Since Stephen is already engaged in a dispute with his audience, the *Exordium* is short and to the point.

Narratio : (Logos 1) "The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran. ³ 'Leave your country and your people,' God said, 'and go to the land I will show you.' ⁴ So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. After the death of his father, God

sent him to this land where you are now living.⁵ He gave him no inheritance here, not even a foot of ground. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child.⁶ God spoke to him in this way: 'Your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years.⁷ But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves,' God said, 'and afterward they will come out of that country and worship me in this place.'⁸ Then he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. And Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth. Later Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs.

(Logos 2)⁹ Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him¹⁰ and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt; so he made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace.¹¹ Then a famine struck all Egypt and Canaan, bringing great suffering, and our fathers could not find food.¹² When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers on their first visit.¹³ On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and Pharaoh learned about Joseph's family.¹⁴ After this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, seventy-five in all.¹⁵ Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our fathers died.¹⁶ Their bodies were brought back to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem for a certain sum of money.¹⁷ As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt greatly increased.¹⁸ Then another king, who knew nothing about Joseph, became ruler of Egypt.¹⁹ He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our forefathers by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die.²⁰ At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child. For three months he was cared for in his father's house.²¹ When he was placed outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him and brought him up as her own son.²² Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.²³ When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his fellow Israelites.²⁴ He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defence and avenged him by killing the Egyptian.²⁵ Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to

rescue them, but they did not.²⁶ The next day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, 'Men, you are brothers; why do you want to hurt each other?'²⁷ But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, 'Who made you ruler and judge over us?'²⁸ Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?'²⁹ When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons.³⁰ After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai.³¹ When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to look more closely, he heard the Lord's voice:³² 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.' Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look.³³ Then the Lord said to him, 'Take off your sandals; the place where you are standing is holy ground.³⁴ I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt'." (Acts 7: 2b - 34 NIV)

This is a long *narratio* which starts with that which is already known and is undisputed shared belief. It has to be long for Stephen to prove convincingly from a few arguments that he has the right and the authority to speak and make judgements. Both Stephen and his audience agree that this is a true story from their history. Stephen has appealed to a Jewish theme which is central to his audience's faith.

The *narratio* prepares the audience for the main thrust of the argument, but it is not the argument itself. Through the *Narratio* Stephen continues to establish his ethos, his personal integrity. Let us consider the *Logos* in the *Narratio*. Stephen has been accused of blaspheming Moses, and so he tells the story of Moses in the *Narratio* to show how he is similar to Moses.

We know from the start of Acts 6 that Stephen is a Hellenised Jew, which means he is most likely a Jew who was raised outside of Israel in the Diaspora. For whatever reason, Stephen has now returned to Jerusalem where there is an underlying tension between those whose primary language is Aramaic and whose culture is Jewish, and those whose primary language is Greek and whose culture is Hellenic. As a Hellenised Jew, Stephen would have been

viewed with suspicion. And so Stephen's *Narratio* starts with the story of Abraham (Logos 1), and Stephen's emphasis is not on God's covenant with Abraham as may be expected, but more so that Abraham was not from Jerusalem or Israel. Stephen emphasizes that Abraham was born in Mesopotamia, and then lived in Haran before coming to Canaan, and that God told him to leave *his home and his people* to go to a new place which God would show him.

Stephen's point with this piece of narrative is that he too, like Abraham, was born outside of Israel, but like Abraham he was called by God to leave his country of birth, and probably to leave his family behind in some part of Babylon or Persia, and to move to Jerusalem.

With this argument, Stephen is claiming that in fact he is more like Abraham than his accusers who have been in Jerusalem all the time.

At this point Stephen introduces circumcision, and moves swiftly through the stories of Isaac, Jacob until he gets to Joseph. (Logos 2) Stephen claims that it was because of the jealousy of Joseph's brothers that Joseph became a prisoner / slave in Egypt. But even so, that God's favour was on Joseph even while he was outside of Israel and rejected by his brothers, who were the fathers of the Jewish tribes. Stephen goes to explain that Joseph's brothers in time were saved by Joseph, the brother who was the outsider in a foreign country. As his bridge to the next reason, Stephen tells of how times changed in Egypt, and eventually the Jews were oppressed in Egypt. Stephen simply says that the Israelites were forced to put their babies outside and leave them to die. Again this has the theme of rejection, of expulsion and removal. Again the ones being "put out" are innocent victims of the wickedness of others.

Stephen simply says that when Moses was put out after three months he was taken up by Pharaoh's daughter. He makes no mention of the lengths to which Moses' family went to try to save him, or to secure his safety. This is probably because that detail would not support his over-arching argument about the nature of the Jewish people. Pharaoh's daughter is instead depicted as a good person, rather than Moses' family.

(Logos 3) Moses was taken into Pharaoh's palace as a baby, and he was raised as a foreigner in a foreign culture and educated in Egyptian schools. In that way Moses was very much like Stephen, as they were both educated in a foreign land, in a foreign language, in a foreign culture. Moses was a stranger to Israel and Judaism in much the same ways as the Hellenised Jews were. And yet Moses was God's chosen agent to lead Israel.

Stephen's *narratio* goes on that when Moses went to meet the Hebrews, they rejected him as a foreigner in the same way these Jews were rejecting Stephen. At this point Stephen's accusers are aligned to those who rejected Moses in Egypt. As the Hebrews rejected Moses' leadership, so these Jews were rejecting Stephen. The result was that Moses fled to Midian, he left his people. He lived for forty years as a foreigner, and his sons were born there. In that desert place, outside of Israel, God met Moses and told him that He was the God of Moses' forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God's comfort to fearful Moses was that he was the God of Abraham, who too was a foreigner.

There are two major thrusts at the end of the *Narratio*. The first is that God said the place where Moses was standing, a place outside of the Promised Land and away from the covenant people, was holy ground. God was with the foreigner Moses as He is with Stephen. The second thrust is that God sent Moses back to rescue the Israelites in Egypt. God used the rejected foreigner, educated in foreign schools and foreign culture in a foreign language, to go and lead the Israelites to salvation. The insinuation is that in the same way God has sent Stephen the foreigner back to the Israelites to proclaim salvation to them.

With the *Narratio* Stephen has shared the old familiar story, visited the old common places of Israelite history, but woven them into the introduction of an argument which established him as a person like the old fathers of Israel. In this *Narratio* Stephen provides convincing reasons as to why he, a foreigner, should be heard and accepted as having some authority. But we will discover that this *narratio* is not only preparing a platform for Stephen's acceptance, in fact it will become the foundation for the acceptance of Jesus later in the speech.

Propositio: ³⁵This is the same Moses whom they had rejected with the words, 'Who made you ruler and judge?' He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God himself, through the angel who appeared to him in the bush.
(Acts 7: 35 NIV)

The *Propositio* is that the Jews are not infallible, but that they have a history of rejecting the very person whom God has sent. In their short sighted guilty misunderstanding of God, they assume the person who presents themselves as the servant of God will be someone who is sent to be their "ruler and judge". They expect someone who will come to condemn them. But Stephen says that God did not send a "ruler and judge" who would condemn them, but a "ruler and DELIVERER" to save them. However the result is the same, they reject the one whom God has sent.

At this point we would be forgiven to think that Stephen is speaking about Moses and drawing similarities to himself.

Probatio: ³⁶ He led them out of Egypt and did wonders and miraculous signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the desert. ³⁷ "This is that Moses who told the Israelites, 'God will send you a prophet like me from your own people.'
³⁸ He was in the assembly in the desert, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; and he received living words to pass on to us.
³⁹ "But our fathers refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt. ⁴⁰ They told Aaron, 'Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who led us out of Egypt—we don't know what has happened to him!' ⁴¹ That was the time they made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and held a celebration in honor of what their hands had made. ⁴² But God turned away and gave them over to the worship of the heavenly bodies. This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets:

'Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings
forty years in the desert, O house of Israel?

⁴³ You have lifted up the shrine of Molech
and the star of your god Rephan,
the idols you made to worship.

Therefore I will send you into exile' beyond Babylon'.

⁴⁴ Our forefathers had the tabernacle of the Testimony with them in the desert. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen.

⁴⁵ Having received the tabernacle, our fathers under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It

remained in the land until the time of David, ⁴⁶ who enjoyed God's favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. ⁴⁷ But it was Solomon who built the house for him.

⁴⁸ However, the Most High does not live in houses made by men. As the prophet says:

⁴⁹ 'Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool.
What kind of house will you build for me?
says the Lord.

Or where will my resting place be?

⁵⁰ Has not my hand made all these things?'

(Acts 7: 36 - 50 NIV)

Stephen argues that Moses' call by God was proven by the miracles which occurred under his leadership. As God's anointed leader, Moses had prophesied that God would send what we now understand to be the Messiah, the Anointed One. In this sentence Stephen is throwing the attention of the audience forward to Jesus. Jesus is now the focal point, not Stephen.

Stephen continues that even though the Israelites had experienced God's anointing on Moses, they rejected him and preferred to return to the slavery from which God wanted to deliver them. They would rather have a hand-made god, than live under the leadership of the one true God.

As Stephen is saying this, you can imagine his audience nodding in agreement and saying, "Yes, that is exactly how they were. That is exactly what happened in the time of Moses". They may even have been thinking that Stephen was just like those who had rejected Moses. Remember that the accusation brought against Stephen by his accusers is that they *"have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses*

handed down to us.” (Acts 6: 14) Stephen drives a wedge between their two accusations through the introduction of a very clever rhetorical twist. Stephen quotes from Amos 5 as a rhetorical question,

“Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings
forty years in the desert, O house of Israel?
⁴³ You have lifted up the shrine of Molech
and the star of your god Rephan,
the idols you made to worship.
Therefore I will send you into exile’ beyond Babylon.”

The answer to the question is “No”, they never offered sacrifice in the desert under the leadership of Moses in what Israelites looked on as the highlight of the spiritual history of Israel.

The next line is an insinuated accusation. Where did the Israelites erect this shrine to Molech that would result in their being sent to Exile in Babylon? Stephen leaves the question unanswered for a brief moment.

Stephen tells that Moses built a Tent of Meeting, which was built exactly as God told him to build it, and met with God with the leaders of Israel in that Tent. Stephen’s rendition is that up until the time of David, and even during the reign of David, people enjoyed the favour of God while meeting in the Tent of Meeting. He goes on to say that the Temple was a human initiative, proposed by David but actually built by Solomon. This is the answer to his rhetorical questions from Amos. Stephen is arguing that the Temple was not God’s plan, but rather that it was a plan to have a Temple like the worshippers of Molech.

A **rhetorical question** is a question a rhetor asks the audience but to which a reply is not expected. Rhetorical questions make the audience wrestle to find an answer, and so think of the topic more deeply.

To say that the Temple will be torn down is not a blasphemy against Moses, because the Temple is an abomination against Moses and God.

The kernel of the *Probatio* is that Israel rejected God, they tried to minimise God through idols, or they tried to confine God to the inside of a building, but that God is a living God not made by human hands, and God is the creator of the universe and so cannot be confined to a Temple built with human hands. God is the God who gives living word and who meets people in the Tent of Meeting which moves and is flexible. The Tent is not a place of confinement; it is not a prison for God. In Stephen's speech, the Tent was made to God's instructions, but the Temple was built because of human desire.

Stephen says that God's punishment of Israel's rejection of God, was that God said God would, and history proves God did, send Israel into Exile in a land beyond Babylon. The Exile in Stephen's speech was proof that God rejected the false worship in the Jerusalem Temple.

This argument would have started to divide the Synagogue Pharisees who originally brought the accusations against Stephen, who were synagogue centred, and the Pharisees who were focussed on the Temple.

Stephen has begun to make his accusation, at this point still by innuendo and allusion, but now Stephen makes his accusation clear.

Peroratio: ⁵¹ "You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! ⁵² Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him— ⁵³ you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it."

(Acts 7: 51 - 53 NIV)

The *Peroratio* sums up the argument and amplifies one or two major points, usually by stirring up the audiences emotions (*Pathos*) and causing them to move out of the realm of knowledge into the realm of belief and action.

In the *Peroratio* of Stephen's speech, he challenges the audience with a severe accusation. By calling them stiff-necked, he directly links the audience with

those who rejected God in previous generations. Stephen is explicit, *“You are just like your father: You always resist the Holy Spirit.”*

Stephen reaches back into the *Narratio* where he mentioned the Promised One whom Moses spoke about, and now says that they even rejected the Messiah, the “Righteous One”.

Stephen is accusing them of murder, and rejecting God. He is stirring up their deep emotions of anger and hatred, the same emotions that were stirred up in their forefathers.

Throughout the speech Stephen is refuting (*refutatio*) the allegation that he has blasphemed Moses, and in v 53 he declares that in fact it is his accusers who have received the Law, but who have refused to obey it.

Evaluation

As we evaluate Stephen’s speech, we ask the questions

- Does he establish his ethos?
- How good are Stephen’s arguments (Logos)?
- How effective is Stephen’s appeal to the deep emotions of the audience? (Pathos)

As Rhetoric is about the effect the speech has on the audience, we have to evaluate this aspect of the rhetoric as the final evaluation.

Stephen is effective in establishing his ethos with the audience. The logic of his arguments show continuity and cohesion. They build towards the end goal, and develop the same theme. The pathos of this speech is intense, and as a reader you can almost feel the depth of the emotion.

The overall effectiveness of the speech is demonstrated by the reaction of Stephen’s audience. They prove Stephen’s logic and accusations to be perfectly true. However at this point Luke has returned to the role of rhetor, and we are back in his telling of the story to Theophilus. The affect Stephen’s speech has on his audience is that “they were furious and gnashed their teeth at Stephen”.

Stephen's purpose was not to defend himself, but to present the accusation that these people rejected God. As their emotion explodes, Stephen looks up to heaven and delivers the final argument which pushes them over the edge. We might think Stephen has gone mad for pressing home the point when clearly he had already offended his audience to breaking point. Luke tells us that "Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God" (v 55) . Again at the crucial moment Luke has shaped his own over-arching rhetoric to confirm Stephen's personal character and right standing with God, at the critical moment when we may question Stephen's obedience.

Then Luke delivers the denouement, the conclusion when the actual proof that these men were just like their fathers who rejected God. Luke tells us, "At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, ⁵⁸ dragged him out of the city and began to stone him." In Luke's rhetorical scheme, by their actions they were confirming that everything Stephen said was true.

Luke's final words about Stephen serve to complete the verification of Stephen's character and the authenticity of Stephen's obedience to God. Luke says, "⁵⁹ While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' ⁶⁰ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' When he had said this, he fell asleep.

In this moment Luke establishes a contrast between those who are Godly, and those who choose to reject God. The rejecters are filled with anger and hatred and they turn to violence to suppress the truth, killing the messengers of God. They claim to be obedient followers of God, judging others supposedly for God's sake, but actually they are far from God. They find the innocent guilty because of the darkness in their own hearts.

In stark contrast, the true followers of God are filled with truth and wisdom, able to control their emotions rather than being overcome by fear, even in the face of death. The Godly do not need to use violence to make the truth true,

they are vindicated by God. Godly people do not need to employ others to bear false witness and bring false testimony, they are able to speak the truth.

The ungodly condemn the righteous to death, but the Godly person reveals the very nature of God and mission of God by extending grace and calling for mercy for the guilty.

By understanding that the main point of this speech only comes out in v 35, and by identifying it as forensic rather than epideictic or deliberative, we are able to identify that the argument is about those who accuse Christians of blasphemy, and yet are themselves the people who have rejected God. It concludes by showing us how to respond to such people. We should not resort to violence, as they do, but we should follow the example of Jesus and pray for the forgiveness of their sin.

Part 3:

The
practicalities of
doing an
exegesis

Chapter 13

The Practicalities of Doing an Exegesis

There are no shortcuts to rightly dividing the Word of God. Without exegesis the Bible is subject to subjectivism (Krejcir 2006:np), whereby it can be made to say things it never intended to say in ways it never said them! If we take things out of context or get our facts wrong we will then lead astray the people who hear us. Faithful exposition of the Bible, however, means letting the text speak for itself.

One of the most important tasks of the preacher/teacher is interpreting biblical texts for theological-spiritual understanding and for practical life application.

The Exegesis process/task falls into three stages:

- **analysis** - examination of the various facets of the text
- **synthesis** - putting together of all the facts discoveries and weighing the significance of each and deciding how each contributes to the overall interpretation (Hayes and Halladay 2007:29)
- **application** - contemporary application of the message of the text for today “from the there-and-then to the here-and-now” (Smith 2008:170)

In this section we will explore briefly what you need to do when you are asked to do an exegesis of a passage. The process of doing an exegesis follows the three steps listed above:

A: ANALYSIS

Step 1: Begin (and proceed) with prayer, asking God for wisdom and insight.

Step 2: Read the passage thoroughly. Familiarise yourself with the content of the passage.

Step 3: Having read through the text you need to decide which critical tool(s) would best suit an exploration of the text in order to glean an understanding of it. As an exegete we need to guard against the error of simply seizing upon the first critical tool that comes to mind (Deist and Burden 1987:128). Since not every critical tool is relevant to every text/passage it is important to let the passage dictate the kind of exegetical tools needed.

Some critical tools work well with certain kinds of texts and not with others. Here are a couple of examples: When exegeting a pericope from the book of Nehemiah (an historical narrative), historical and narrative criticism would be useful. Chisholm (2006: 21) says: "rather than a dry record of bare facts about what happened in the past," the historical books contain "exciting and fascinating stories" of a highly literary nature that "read more like a historical novel complete with plot structure and character development".

However, when exegeting Matthew 8.5-13 Source and Redaction criticism rather than Narrative criticism would be more useful since this passage is an example of pericope in the synoptic gospels⁶ where a comparison with the treatment of the same material by another evangelist may help to throw light on the special concerns of this writer.

Some texts present no significant text-critical problems therefore we would not be too concerned with using textual criticism when exegeting that text. An example would be the book of Nehemiah where the Hebrew text of Ezra-Nehemiah has been well preserved with no major difficulties (Yamauchi 1988:587).

Although there are thousands of textual variants within the manuscript tradition of the NT, relatively few of them will significantly affect the understanding of a passage; which means that textual criticism is not useful tool in those cases (Hayes and Holladay 2007:179). Whereas the book of

⁶ This narrative is also found in Luke 7.1-10. There is nearly verbal equivalence in the dialogue in verses 8b-10 but for the rest, while the essential features of the story are the same they are told in a very different way due to the differences in each of their contexts (France 1979:253).

Samuel has a number of textual problems, for example 1 Samuel 14:18.⁷ Therefore, textual criticism would be essential for working with that verse.

Use of various critical tools will also depend on what you want to achieve through your exegesis. It is your own study goal that will determine whether you concentrate your interest primarily on questions about origin and historical context; on questions about its wider religious context and background; or on a theological question proper (Kaiser and Kummel 1967:41-42). In the end exegesis is less about applying methods and more about seeking meaning (Hayes and Holladay 2007:179).

As mentioned in Chapter 3, at TEEC we advise our students to apply both synchronic and diachronic analysis when exegeting a text so as to ensure, as much as it is possible, a full understanding of the chosen biblical text.

With this in mind choose at least one critical tool from each of the synchronic and diachronic approaches.

Step 4: Begin to go through all the questions that the chosen critical tools asks of you in order to analyse the passage: (The questions are referred to above under the explanation of each of the given Biblical Criticisms – Chapters 4-12). Remember that not all the questions listed under each of the Biblical Critical Methods will necessarily be applicable to each passage.

B: SYNTHESIS

With each successive step in the exegetical process, the exegete hopes to move closer to his/her goal – a clear understanding of the text, enabling him/her to interpret the passage accurately.

Step 5: Having dealt with the various details in the biblical text, good exegesis then asks how these findings fit together (Corley *et al* 2002:12). You as the exegete then need to pull together the results of your

⁷ According to background to this verse Saul is in a jam, he expects to face an attack by the Philistines, and he is not sure what to do, so he calls for the '*Ark of God*'. The Septuagint's use here of the word "ephod" instead of the term "ark" may be the better reading. The ark had already been deposited at Kirjath Jearim (1 Sam. 7:1). The ark remained there (1 Sam. 7:2) until David moved it to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:1–17). Bringing it to Saul's camp seems unlikely since the ark was not an object casually carried about (see Num. 4:15, 20). Since Saul is speaking to a priest, it would seem more logical that he would be seeking to know God's will rather than to have the ark present (Patterson 1997:np); hence the word ephod is probably what is meant here.

investigation. This will be done as Hayes (2007:28) suggests through weighing the significance of the individual conclusions in light of the others and then deciding how all these contribute to the overall understanding of the text – through a process of synthesis.

When you have finished answering all the questions of the particular critical tool you have chosen to use, underline the answers that give you the most helpful information to interpret the passage. Take the answers that you have underlined and use them to write an essay that uses the following structure:

(i) In your **introduction** briefly summarise what the passage is about and which critical tools you have used and why.

(ii) **Context:**

Historical context: Write a paragraph on the general background of the book in which the text is found. This will include a brief discussion on the authorship, date, and recipients/audience of the book. In addition you need to discuss the occasion and purpose of the book. Only include information that is relevant to understanding the chosen passage better.

Literary Context: Write a paragraph on how the passage fits into its immediate context. What does it follow? What does it precede?

(iii) **The meaning:** This section is the heart of the exegetical study, consisting of an in-depth analysis of the text.

Write a few paragraphs to explain each of the insights you have gained from analysing the passage using the critical tool(s) you have used.

Eg. A. If you have used Historical and Grammatical criticism, explain the historical and cultural background of the passage and particular words and phrases that can only be properly understood if one knows the history, geography or culture of the day, or the background of the author and community to whom it was written.

Eg. B. If you have used Redaction criticism, identify the particular themes or emphases of the author/redactor in the passage that can help us understand the purpose of the author.

Eg. C. If you have used the Narrative criticism, discuss what you have learned about the characters, the narrator and narratees, the plot, narrative time and narrated time, settings, etc... to identify what meaning might lie in the narrative.

C: APPLICATION

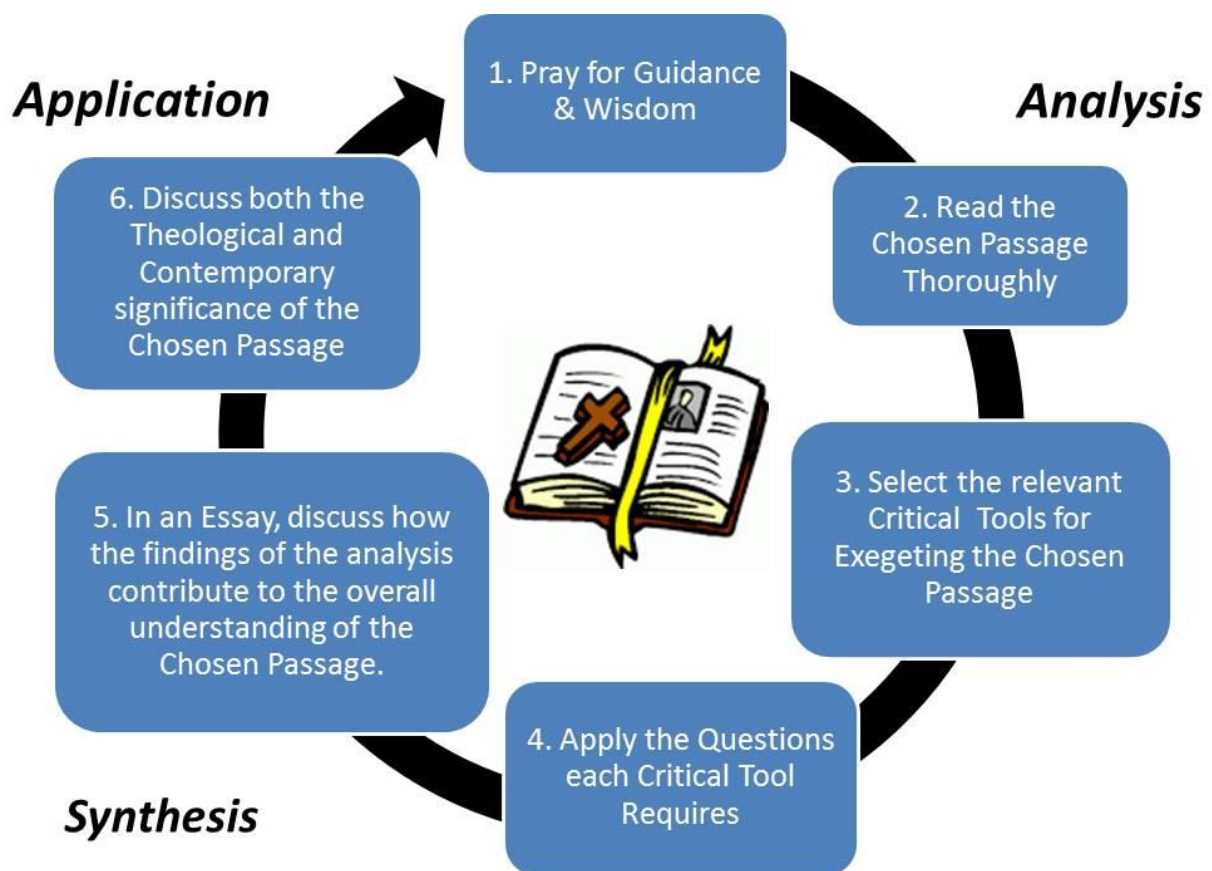
Exegesis is more than a report of one's research - one needs to develop a coherent interpretation of the passage based on a careful review of the information (Hayes et al 2007:185). This includes addressing both the theological and the contemporary significance of the passage. The theological significance shows what the passage teaches us about God, while the contemporary significance discusses how the text can be applied to crucial concerns of today. The ultimate goal of the interpretation of Scripture should be to discern the normative truth of God for today and apply it to daily living (McDill 2014:4).

Step 6: Finally discuss both theological and contemporary the significance of this passage. Begin by discussing what universal truths/principles are taught through the passage - these may be direct or indirect. This should be followed by applying the meaning of the passage, with relevance to a contemporary context or situation today. As you do so allow the values of Jesus to guide you in how the message of the text arising from your exegetical work might be applicable to people today.

Since exegesis alone has no power to produce change – which is the goal of interacting with God's Word (Romans 15:4 and John 15:11) – we need to put the audience into a position where they can feel the original impact of the 'story' and be transformed by it. We can only do this through authentic interpretation and contextualisation. This is in line with Marshall's (1979:73) comment, that the texts which we interpret must be a means through which God speaks to men and women today. Equally application

that is uninformed by exegesis has no foundation (Tate 2002:3). Theology that is not applied to the lives of God's people is sterile (Stuart 1980:12).

The Exegetical Method



Chapter 14

Examples of Exegetical papers.

EXAMPLE 1:

Matthew 16: 13-23 (Using Historical, Source, and Redaction Criticisms)

[Introduction]⁸

In this passage we find Jesus and his disciples in the district of Caesarea Philippi where he questions his disciples about his identity. He asks them first what others have been saying about who he is. He then goes on to ask them who they say he is. Peter answers that Jesus is the Messiah. Peter however tries to persuade Jesus that he should not go to Jerusalem to die and Jesus reprimands him, saying that he does not understand the ways of God.

In order to exegete Matthew 16:13-23 the following Exegetical tools will be employed: Historical, Source and Redaction criticism. It is important to know something of its background and the wider course of events to which it refers in order to understand better its contribution to the unfolding of the biblical story as a whole (Carson *et al* 1994:420). Moreover there is historical information within the passage which would have been familiar to the first readers but which might not necessarily be understood by those reading this narrative today. It is with this in mind that this paper begins with endeavouring to answer questions around authorship, date, background, occasion and purpose of writing the gospel of Matthew in light of its historical circumstance.

Since Matthew forms part of the Synoptic Gospels it is significant to note the sources of this gospel and how these sources were used in different ways to share the specific message Matthew wished his readers to understand. Hence the importance of using both Source and Redaction criticism in order to better understand the possible meanings of the passage for us today.

⁸ You would not normally include the various headings when writing up an exegetical paper. I have included them to show you the various elements which need to be included when synthesizing your exegetical findings.

[Context:]

[Historical context]

Although the author of this gospel is unnamed both the early church and the Orthodox Protestant view is that this gospel is the work of the apostle Matthew – also known as Levi (France 1989:77; Lioy 2004:11-12).

Crosby (2002:16-17) notes that Matthew's name in Greek it sounds so much like the Greek word for disciple – an important theme of this gospel. There is however, no reason to believe that the early church merely guessed that Matthew was the author or that it was a pseudonym (France 1989:79). Thus, it can be reasonably assumed that the apostle Matthew is the author of the gospel.

Despite there being no manuscript evidence, most scholars believe that Matthew's Gospel was written in about 85-90 CE, after the split between Jews and Christians in about 85 CE (Carter 2000:16). The Roman Jewish war and destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 CE had brought major changes to the Jewish community. After the war of 70 CE, in light of the loss of their homeland and the loss of Temple, Jews needed to redefine what it meant to be Jewish (TEEC 2017b:8.3).

Although there is almost no evidence outside of the New Testament text to suggest who the original readers of Matthew's gospel were, the most common view is that Matthew's primary audience were Jewish Christians (Keener 1999:49; Long 1997:1-2). Based on the number of Jewish specific and Old Testament references found in this gospel, Patterson (1997: np) suggests that it was written chiefly for the Jews, who knew the prophecies found in the Hebrew Scriptures. At the time of writing this gospel the church was undergoing persecution and the Jewish Christians in particular were being excluded from their synagogues. One of the big issues Matthew was trying to address for his community was to help them understand their own identity. So Matthew presents Jesus as the true Messiah and fulfilment of all Israel's hopes, and the Church as the new, true Israel (Bosch 1991:59). Moreover, "he seeks to help his community to recognize that through the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus, the boundaries of Judaism had been opened in a significant way to the Gentiles" (TEEC 2017b:8.4).

Through the theme of fulfillment the author sought to show that Jesus was indeed the long-expected Messiah of Israel, whom the prophets had foretold. Another important theme found in Matthew's gospel is that of discipleship. "The

Sermon on the Mount and related teachings not only gives the code of conduct God requires but, more importantly, the quality of the relationship Jesus desired with His disciples” (MacDonald and Farstad 1997:np).

[Literary context:]

Chapter 16:13-23 falls into the larger section of Matthew’s gospel which relates Jesus’ message and ministry. As Jesus’ Galilean ministry draws to a close, Jesus once again finds himself being challenged by the unbelieving religious leaders (Chapter 16:1-4). When the disciples rejoined Jesus on the east side of the lake, they had forgotten to take food with them. Jesus uses this opportunity of the disciples worrying about not having any bread to teach of the danger of the ‘yeast’ of the Pharisees and Sadducees (16:5-12). The wrong teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees were lading the entire nation astray (Barton 2001:75). The chosen passage is sandwiched between Jesus warning his disciples against false teaching and a ‘hard’ lesson – disciples of Christ are called to put aside selfish ambition, deny themselves and to follow Him by faith (16:26-28). In light of Matthew’s persistent theme of discipleship this passage continues that theme as Jesus instructs His disciples for their ongoing ministry.

[The meaning:]

The fact that the incident takes place in the region of **Caesarea Philippi** is significant. Caesarea Philippi was named after the Roman Emperor Caesar and Herod Philip. It was thus a symbol of the Roman Empire and the Roman Emperor who was the dominant power ruling the world at the time.

Peter’s response to Jesus’ question “Who do you say that I am?” is thus significant. Peter answers with the words: “**You are the Christ, Son of the Living God**”. The word Christ is the Greek form of the title “Messiah” and means “anointed one”. When the kings of Israel were installed as king they were anointed with oil as a sign of God’s blessing on them. Thus Jewish hope for a Messiah was the hope that a king in the line of David would once again rule over the kingdom of Israel. But there was one obstacle to this: the Roman Empire. The Jewish hope of a Messiah was therefore the hope that God would raise up someone in the line of David to overthrow the Roman Empire and to re-establish the Kingdom of Israel.

When Peter says to Jesus “**You are the Christ**”, he is thus expressing the hope and the belief that Jesus is the one they have all been waiting for, who would finally overthrow the Roman oppressors.

When we see the story in this light, we also discover that the reference to Caesarea Philippi is truly significant. In the passage, a contrast is made between Jesus, (who Peter believes is) the Messiah, and the city of Caesar, the Roman Emperor. In the passage, Jesus is thus being described as a potential rival to Caesar. The writer of Matthew's Gospel seems to emphasize this contrast by adding the phrase **"Son of the Living God"** to the original passage from Mark 8:29 which Matthew used as his main source. It is significant for two reasons. Firstly, the kings of Israel were described as 'son of God' not because they were thought to be Divine, but rather because they were thought to be God's representatives on earth. Secondly the phrase 'Son of the Living God' is significant because one of the titles used to describe Caesar was "son of God" or "son of the god's".

In this passage therefore, a contrast is set up between Caesar and Jesus. In this story, which we are told takes place in the region of the city of Caesar, we discover that there is a rival to Caesar. We discover that the promised Messiah has arrived. We are told in the phrase "Son of the Living God", that there is a rival Son of God to Caesar who claimed to be a 'son of the god's', and there is a rival king: Jesus.

But the passage does not leave us there. When Jesus begins to speak of his sufferings and death in Jerusalem, (verse 21) we see that Jesus' understanding of himself as Messiah is very different from Peter's understanding of what the Messiah should be. We also discover that Jesus sees himself as a very different kind of Son of God, and a very different kind of King to Caesar.

When Peter expressed his belief that Jesus was the Messiah, and thus a rival to Caesar, he was expressing the common hope of the majority of Jews who were expecting a warrior Messiah and king who would over-throw the Roman Empire using the methods of power, of force and violence. Jesus however speaks of himself as one who will **"suffer many things"**. This reminds us of the passage from Isaiah 53:3

"He was despised and rejected by other's; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity," (NRSV).

In this passage we see that Jesus' understanding of what it means to be the messiah is completely different to Peter's. Jesus saw himself as ushering in God's Kingdom, not by the ways of power, force and violence, but through the humility and suffering love of Isaiah's "Suffering Servant". The ways of violence, force and power, are according to Jesus' words, the ways of Satan and the ways of humans, not the ways of God. The ways of power, force and violence were also

the ways of Caesar and the Roman Empire. Thus in this passage we see that although Jesus is a rival to Caesar, Jesus promises a Kingdom that is very different from the Empire and the oppressive methods of Caesar. Jesus is ushering in a Kingdom that will not use the ways of power, force and violence like Caesar. The true Messiah of Israel will thus not be one who overthrows Caesar using the methods of Caesar, but rather by the methods of gentleness, truthfulness, humility and a love that is willing to suffer on behalf of others.

This takes us back to the phrase **“Son of Man”** in verse 13, when Jesus asks the disciples the question: “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” The Son of Man is one of the primary titles that Jesus gives to himself in the Gospel of Matthew (and all the synoptic Gospels). It is a phrase that means “son of a human being”, or simply “a human being”. We encounter this phrase in Daniel 7:13. Daniel has just described a number of creatures that look like wild beasts. In Daniel, these are symbolic representations of the powerful and cruel empires that oppressed Israel in their history. In contrast to these empires that were cruel like wild beasts, Daniel sees a vision of one who looks like a human being who receives a Kingdom from God that will last forever.

Thus the Kingdom of the “one like a Son of Man” is meant to be a truly humane and human Kingdom in contrast to the cruel, beast-like empires of the world. Consequently, in this story from Matthew’s Gospel, we get a hint in verse 13, from the mouth of Jesus himself that he is the “human one” who will usher in a Kingdom from God that will honour people’s humanity and will be truly humane.

[Theological and contemporary Significance]

In this passage, we see a contrast between two ways of living: The way of Caesar, and the way of Jesus. The way of Caesar was the way of power, force and violence (also the way of Peter, and the way of sinful human beings, and the way of ‘Satan’). The way of Jesus was the way of servant love.

One of Matthew’s purposes in writing his Gospel was to make disciples. Matthew uses the word disciple more than any other Gospel writer. This story is thus suggesting that to be a true disciple of Jesus is to abandon the way of Caesar and to follow the way of the servant king Jesus.

What does this mean for our world today? In South Africa we continue to hear stories of police brutality and violence. We have recently heard (September/October 2017) about how police were involved in the torture and subsequent death of an Apartheid activist Ahmed Timol in 1971. Originally we were lead to believe that he had committed suicide jumping to his death at John Vorster Square. These are the signs of what happens when the Police

Commissioner tells policeman they should use the ways of power, force and violence in his “shoot to kill” policy. It is the way of Caesar!

The tragic death of Noxolo Nogwaza, a 24-year-old lesbian living on the East Rand where she was raped and murdered in an incident of what is called “corrective rape”. The rapists and murderers of the Noxolo were using the methods of Caesar, the ways of force, power and violence, the ways of ‘Satan’. They were using the ways of Caesar, not the way of Jesus.

Everyday, there are incidents of domestic violence (most often directed against women) where a person uses the ways of Caesar, of power, force and violence against their spouse. These incidents are contrary to the way of Jesus, and yet they are often perpetrated by people who would consider themselves Church-goers and Christians.

Everyday, leaders in business, government and even the Church try to use force, and power (and sometimes even violence) in the way they treat people. They are using the ways of Caesar, not the way of Jesus.

Every time we try to use force, power and violence to get our way in life, we have abandoned the way of Jesus and have begun to use the way of Caesar. This passage thus invites us in all our doings and dealings with people to give up the way of power, force and violence and to become true disciples of the way of Jesus, the way of humility, gentleness, compassion and a love that is willing to suffer for doing what is right.

If we wish for God’s Kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven, it will come as we hear the call to become disciples of Jesus, rather than disciples of Caesar.

[2412 words]

Comments and Reflections on the Above Exegesis:

- 1) Notice that the final product of an exegesis needs to be in the form of an essay and a discussion that is seeking to reveal one possible meaning or interpretation of a passage.
- 2) Notice that the introductory paragraph gives a very brief summary of the passage, before going on to begin to explain the details of the passage.
- 3) This was followed by placing the passage both within its historical and literary context. This is the work of the Historical method of exegesis.
- 4) Notice how some of the words and phrases explained in the passage are explained by the political and historical situation of the time. This is the work of the Historical Criticism
- 5) Notice also how this exegesis in one place compares the passage to Mark's version as the major source that Matthew's Gospel drew on. Notice also how this exegesis helps to identify those phrases in the passage that are similar to passages in the Old Testament. This is the work of Source Criticism.
- 6) Notice in this exegesis that reference is also made to one of Matthew's primary purposes: to make disciples. Identifying Matthew's particular perspective is the work of Redaction Criticism.
- 7) Notice how once the meaning of particular words and phrases have been explored and one possible meaning of the passage is identified, the exegesis then begins to make links with issues and situations in this world. Concrete and practical situations in the world and in the news have been identified in which the meaning of the passage is able to speak.

EXAMPLE 2:

Nehemiah 1:1-11 **(Using Historical and Narrative Criticisms)**

[Introduction]⁹

Nehemiah, cupbearer to King Artaxerxes I, on receiving news of the devastating struggles experienced by his fellow Jews in Jerusalem who had escaped captivity, is greatly moved. Identifying himself with their suffering and having spent some time in mourning and fasting, this man of prayer now intercedes on their behalf (verses 5-11). Throughout his prayer there is a clear sense of hope as he acknowledges God's faithfulness to his covenant (Sailhamer 1994:305). Moreover, he makes himself available to the Lord to get the job done (Wiersbe 1997: np).

To exegete Nehemiah 1:1-11 the following Exegetical tools will be employed: historical and narrative criticism. The book of Nehemiah takes the form of a historical narrative and this necessitates an understanding of its background and the wider course of events as part of the larger biblical story (Carson *et al* 1994:420). Moreover there is historical information within the passage which would have been familiar to the first readers but which might not necessarily be understood to those reading this narrative today. It is with this in mind that this paper begins with exploring the questions around authorship, date, background, occasion and purpose of writing the book of Nehemiah in light of its historical circumstance. Narrative criticism will help us engage with the text as a story with meaning, while historical criticism will be used to point out any unfamiliar customs or beliefs that require explanation in order to better understand the possible meanings of the passage for us today.

⁹ You would not normally include the various headings when writing up an exegetical paper. I have included them to show you the various elements which need to be included when synthesizing your exegetical findings.

[Context:]

[Historical context]

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah were originally one book in the Talmud, in Josephus, in the Canon of Melito of 171 CE and in the Masoretic Text. This explains why the story of Ezra is found partly in the book of Ezra and partly in the book of Nehemiah (Anderson 1975:510-511) - Ezra's story is climaxed in Nehemiah 8-10 and part of Nehemiah's story is in Ezra 4:6-23 (Martin 1988:546).

The issues of authorship, composition, and date are intertwined and will therefore be discussed together.

The commonly held view accepted by conservative as well as critical scholars, is that, along with 1 and 2 Chronicles Ezra and Nehemiah were produced by an anonymous person or group of persons called "the Chronicler" (Schoville 2001:29). Japhet and Williamson have challenged this view, believing that Ezra-Nehemiah is the work of another author (Throntveit 1992:8-9). Min in his doctoral dissertation concurs with them; concluding that the most probable origin for Ezra-Nehemiah lies in Levitical circles. Furthermore, he suggests that it was composed at a time when Levites' status and authority had been improved, "following Persian disenchantment with the priesthood" (Min 2002: i).

With uncertainty in identifying a specific author, it becomes challenging to be precise about the date. A major factor in giving even a proximate time period for the final composition of the book relies on the ability to fix a date for the events which are narrated in the book. While there is scholarly disagreement, Longman, Williamson and Throntveit side with a traditional date for Ezra's mission (458 BCE), which allows them to fix a date as early as the turn of the century (400 BCE). According to Min (2002:48) the suggested dating of Ezra-Nehemiah to the late fifth century BCE is at present the most accurate.

The combined books of Ezra-Nehemiah give us a glimpse of the struggles of the Israelites as they return to Judah from captivity in Babylon and re-establish their community centred around the Temple. The post-exilic Jewish community was struggling to maintain its identity as the people of God, as it faced internal and external pressures. Not only were the returning exiles strangers to a land that

was populated by Jews who had not been taken into exile, together with persons of other ethnic origins who had also begun to settle there, but they showed spiritual lethargy and a cold-hearted indifference toward God (Radmacher 2007:np).

But Ezra-Nehemiah is more than a simple chronicle of events; the author uses narration to teach and guide the community in its faith and everyday life (Breneman 2012:397). Ezra-Nehemiah was a call to remember the past struggles of the Jewish community that had maintained its identity, and a summons to walk faithfully in the old ways rather than be enticed away from God (Schoville 2001: 135). There is a combination of confession and petition at the heart of this message as it aims not only to encourage the community to persevere in hope but also to bring them again to repentance so that the ancient promises of freedom in service to the Lord alone might be more fully realized among them (McConville 2008:801).

[Literary Context:]

The chosen passage for exegesis (Nehemiah 1:1-11), which includes the superscription “the words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah” (1:1a), introduces the greater historical narrative found in the book of Nehemiah which describes the circumstances attending the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem in 444 BCE, and its dedication some years later, despite external opposition and internal squabbles. This narrative sets the scene for what it to follow: it is through a godly man’s faith in God’s faithfulness and providence towards His people, that restoration will take place. Nehemiah 1:1-11 is followed by Nehemiah seeking permission from Artaxerxes 1 to go to Jerusalem to begin rebuilding the city walls.

[The meaning]

The scene opens in the royal winter palace of the Persian king at Susa, in the month of Kislev in the 20th year of the reign of Artaxerxes I, i.e. November/December 446 BCE. This opening scene presents a difficult historical problem - Who is the king Nehemiah serves and what year provides the setting for this passage. There is wide consensus based on evidence in the Elephantine papyri that Artaxerxes 1 (465-424) is the king in question.

In the first person, Nehemiah the narrator, relates how, while he was in attendance on the court at Susa, he heard of the desolation of Jerusalem through his brother Hanani. The narrator is not omniscient, he did not know what was happening in Jerusalem until he was informed.

Nehemiah is also the protagonist and is a round character – as the story progresses we learn more about him as he responds to Hanani's bad report and through his prayer. Despite being in a comfortable position he still cares for his people and his ancestral home. He expresses heartfelt sorrow and self-denial. He is a man of God who knows His God and does not hesitate to seek His face in fasting, praise, confession and petition. As the narrative comes to a close we learn that he is also a man of action who is prepared to be a part of the solution.

The antagonist within this narrative is the personification of the desolation of Jerusalem. This situation comes against Nehemiah and forces him to do something which might even sacrifice his court position. God is a round character whose qualities are revealed and developed through Nehemiah's prayer.

The other characters within this narrative which play a role in Nehemiah's resultant mourning and prayer to God - Hanani, the men from Judah, the Jews who have survived exile are flat. Artaxerxes is a flat character in this narrative but becomes an agent in Chapter 2.

Nehemiah's response to the distressing news from Jerusalem reveals the depth of his concern and compassion for his people. According to Nehemiah 1:4, Nehemiah's grief was intense - "I sat down and wept", enduring - "and mourned for days", and self-denying -and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven"; Garcia 2014). 'Sat down' was a customary posture in mourning and fasting (cf. Job 2:8, 13; Clines 1984:137) Fasting was added to intercession as "an effective means of strengthening the force of a prayer" (Williamson 1985:172; Pratte 2013:np).

The Initial situation of the narrative is the palace in Suza where a delegation from Jerusalem arrives (verses 1b-2). The rising action/problem is the bad report from

Jerusalem (verse 3). The resolution is verse 10 where hope is restored in trusting God to provide for his people in their distress. The final situation is verse 11b where Nehemiah is poised because he is the cupbearer. Due to his position he has access to the king and a possible means to employ the plan. The narrative moves from hopelessness and despair due to Hanani's report to hope in God and a plan to change the situation in Jerusalem.

The two conversations within the narrative assist in its flow. The first which occurs between Hanani and Nehemiah (verse 2b-3) effects the rising action which in turn results in the second conversation between Nehemiah and God. This conversation brings Nehemiah to a place where he is now ready to face the King and with God's favour to do something about the problem.

An effective narrative crescendo is achieved in verse 11 as "this man" is identified later in the verse as "the king," and in the next verse is further identified as Artaxerxes. We at once understand Nehemiah's access to the king and his status at court. The reader's developing awareness of just how precarious Nehemiah's situation was successfully carries him forward into the next episode of the narrative (Williamson 1985:174).

The bulk of the narrative records Nehemiah's second response to the devastating news from Jerusalem – his prayer. Nehemiah's prayer lays a meaningful foundation for his mission; forming a bridge between Nehemiah's response of grief to the bad report from Jerusalem and his audience with Artaxerxes in Chapter 2 (Allen and Laniak 2003: 88)

The form of the prayer itself is unparalleled in scripture- it lacks the complaint so characteristic of the community lament with which it is sometimes compared (Williamson 1985:171). His prayer begins with praise as Nehemiah honours God as the God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps His covenant and shows mercy to those who love Him and keep His commands. Nehemiah's use of the title 'the great and awesome God' indicates Nehemiah's appreciation of who God is: the one whom Nehemiah fears and the source and object of his deep faith.

Two confessions, one negative, regarding Israel's sin and one positive regarding God's redemption, frame the heart of the prayer which consists of Nehemiah's appeal to God to remember the covenantal promise of return on the basis of

Deuteronomy 30:1-5 (Throntveit 1992:63). Nehemiah recognizing the seriousness of disobeying God's commandments offers a prayer of confession, openly admitting their corrupt conduct toward God. Acknowledging that God had justly punished Israel, Nehemiah then reminds Him that this very situation had been anticipated in Deuteronomy 4:25–31 and of his promise of mercy, faithfulness, and forgiveness.

Narrated time is 'some days' from hearing the devastating news from Jerusalem to his decision to meet with king. Looking at narrative time the narrator spends the bulk of the narrative in prayer (verses 5-11a) rather than on the report from Jerusalem, giving emphasis to the role God will play in the unfolding story.

Having spent some time in prayer, Nehemiah was arriving at a decisive moment. After his prayer he seeks the opportunity for action. At this point we are not told exactly what request he wanted to make; however, the next chapter immediately reveals that Nehemiah wanted the king to empower him to go back to help the Jews with the problems Nehemiah had heard about (cf. 2:1-8). His final petition looks forward to the events of 2:1-8. Here realising that he will be God's instrument he prays for success with his fickle master (Throntveit 1992:65). Nehemiah called him "this man," perhaps to stress that he was only a human under God's sovereignty. Nehemiah knew the seriousness of his undertaking and put his case in God's hands (Breneman 2012:174). Only God could establish the environment in which Nehemiah could find favor before the king.

[Theological and contemporary Significance]

Nehemiah provides a good example of the way in which Israel retold stories to address new situations in the life of God's people as certain theological truths are taught.

Behind the various scenes of this book we find a man 'on his knees' before a great and awesome God. It is therefore not surprising that this book opens with Nehemiah responding to some distressing news about his ancestral home by turning to the Lord in prayer. This is the first of Nehemiah's eleven prayers and reveals the power of prevailing prayer (Garcia 2014: np).

The first practical step Nehemiah takes is to pray, and from his prayer one can learn much. First it is helpful to note that Nehemiah did not impulsively rush into action – prayer came first. His prayer did not begin with the need that was pressing on him, it started with a focus on God as He worships Him (cf. Neh.1:5). As Oakley (2001: np) says by beginning with God Nehemiah has his priorities right. When one begins with God it puts everything else in its right place - opponents, difficulties, situations, and oneself.

Nehemiah's prayer was based on his profound understanding and faith in what God had promised. A conviction of faith inspires bold petition. Nehemiah knew his God was great and therefore was not afraid to make a bold request (Smith 1995: np).

Nehemiah's prayer (verses 5-10) blends the themes of divine sovereignty and human responsibility in perfect balance (Chisholm and Howard 2006:100). The pathway of blessing lies in seeking the Lord and in forsaking sin. Those who thus return to the Lord will find Him full of mercy and pardon. The faithfulness of God also involves disciplining us for sin, so we ought not think that He is being less than true to His covenant when we feel the hard but loving hand of His chastisement (see [Heb.12:3–11](#)).

What does this mean for our world today? Most of us, like Nehemiah, know that prayer is important and that it should be a priority in our lives. So why is it that such authentic spirituality is too often lacking today? The answer could be that we live in a society which is crowded with scheduled activities and 'the pressure of the now' too often robs us of the opportunity to spend time with God (Luecke 2017:np). As Muck (1985:25) concurs "We live in a culture that discourages prayer. We are a mechanized, secularized society. This ease of satisfying want and whim is what makes prayer so difficult. Prayer, the essence of which is obedience and submission, runs counter to a culture where we are beholden to very few."

This narrative found in Nehemiah 1:1-11 challenges us to exercise faith in the face of the overwhelming, to persevere in the face of problems, and then to be prepared to be a part of the solution. But more than that, it teaches us the importance of spending time with God in prayer in order to accomplish the above.

Nehemiah's prayer is not just a well-written composition or a polished piece of religious verse. It is the result of days of fasting and prayer. His devotion to God, his dependence on Him for everything, and his desire for the glory of God found equal expression through this prayer.

I believe Nehemiah's prayer offers a good template for our prayer-life. It reflects many qualities that we can incorporate into our praying if we want to find the heart of God for our lives – humility, trust, perseverance - and to succeed in doing His will.

First, Nehemiah began his prayer by focusing on God rather than on the problem that distressed him; his prayer starting with God as he praises Him. This establishes the whole spirit of the prayer because it immediately rises to heaven from where difficulties and problems are best viewed. Moreover, it reflects upon the character of the One who has all power at his disposal to help His people (Dray 2006:66).

Second, Nehemiah was persistent in prayer. According to Nehemiah 1:6 he prayed before God day and night. Prayer can degenerate into vain repetitions, but Nehemiah's consistent and persistent prayers have resulted from a burdened heart. In the parable of the persistent widow, Jesus taught that persevering prayer is effective (Matt 18:1–8; Schoville 2001:141)

Third, because of his conviction about God's character, Nehemiah knew that God was not only able, but also willing to respond to his prayer. As mentioned before a conviction of faith inspires bold petition.

Fourth, having owned what he and his people did wrong Nehemiah expresses confidence in God's promises (Neh 1:8-10). In this part of his prayer, Nehemiah recalls the words of Moses about the danger of Israel's apostasy and the promise of divine mercy. In addition, Nehemiah did not just use biblical words but, in faith, he used God's words to strengthen that faith, knowing that he sought those things which were part of God's plan (Dray 2006:66). The secret to great power in prayer is to plead the promises of God.

Fifth, throughout this prayer we are made aware of Nehemiah's dependence upon God. When Nehemiah fervently asked God to hear the prayers of His servant (see verses 6, 11), it reflected his complete dependence on the Lord. Prayer transforms our hearts and causes us to be dependent upon Him.

At the end of Nehemiah's prayer (verse 11), he makes a statement which shows us that this is more than passive intercession. This is a prayer of a man of action. Nehemiah prays with a heart ready to do something! Some prayers will never be answered unless God's people take an active role in their fulfillment. We need to be prepared to be instrumental in getting the work of God done.

As children of God, we have the awesome privilege of daily communing with 'the great and awesome God.' It is important that we do not allow 'the pressure of the now' to rob us of this opportunity to spend time with God. Rather like Nehemiah let us worship Him, and acknowledge our sinfulness and our inability to face life's challenges without him.

[3031 words]

Part 4:

Resources for Exegesis

Chapter 15

Resources for Exegesis

The following pages contain a list of secondary resources which you might find helpful in the process of exegesis. It is necessary to consult many kinds of books in addition to the Bible itself. This is particularly important when researching the historical context around the passage you are exegeting. What is more, it is important to see what others have written about the passage as this is a way of confirming or testing your interpretation.

Resources for understanding the task of Exegesis

Deist, FE, Burden, JJ. 1987. *An ABC of Biblical Exegesis*. Pretoria: JL van Schaik.

Fee, GD, Stuart, D. 1982. *How to read the Bible for all its worth*. Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House.

Gorman, MJ. 2001. *Elements of biblical exegesis*. Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers.

Hayes, JH, Holladay, CR. 2007. *Biblical exegesis: a beginner's handbook*. London: Westminster John Knox Press.

McKnight S (ed.) 1989. *Introducing New Testament interpretation*. Michigan: Baker Book House.

Stenger, W. 1993. *Introduction to New Testament exegesis*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Stuart, D. 2009. *Old Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox.

Resources for understanding the text:

1. Bible Dictionaries and Encyclopaedias:

Both these resources contain short entries on key words and concepts related to biblical texts. Entries include full historical references such as date, religious environment, family life, customs, language, and literature. Use them for keywords in your passage including the author, book title, central topics, and key names of people and places. Since they are brief, they can give an overview of a study or offer a broader consensus that scholars give to many differing readings. Once you have defined the parameters of your topic, you can enlarge your understanding by reading more specialized books and articles.

Examples include:

Botterweck, GJ, Ringgren, H, Fabry, HJ. 2004. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing.

[Elwell](#), WA, [Beitzel](#), BJ. 1988. *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

Freedman, DN. (ed). 1992. *Anchor Bible Dictionary*. New York: Doubleday

Sawyer, FA. 2009. *A Concise Dictionary of the Bible and its Reception*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox.

Schneider, G, Horst RB.1990. *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing.

Tenney, MC, Silva, M 2009. *Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible (5 vols.)*. San Francisco: HarperCollins.

2. Bible Atlases:

The Bible contains extensive historical materials and countless references to the geographical background of that history. The Middle East itself contains numerous states, cities, villages, mountains, rivers ... many of the names have changed from century to century. Thus, in order to have a proper perspective as to what is happening in a particular text, it is very helpful to have a set of

maps, so that you can follow the narrative in your mind's eye and have a greater understanding of the geographical background. We can then see, for example, the strategic importance of Israel as an important route through the Middle East, making it a target of the various imperial powers through the centuries.

We are also able to get a picture of the area of Jesus' ministry, the relationship between Galilee and Jerusalem and the Samaritan territory between them, and so on.

Examples include:

Beitzel, BJ. 2009. *The New Moody Atlas of the Bible*. Chicago: Moody.

Rasmussen, C. 2010. *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Currid, JD., Barrett, DP. 2010. *Crossway ESV Bible Atlas*. Wheaton: Crossway.

Brisco, T. 1998. *Holman Bible Atlas: A Complete Guide to the Expansive Geography of Biblical History*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman.

3. Concordances:

A concordance contains an alphabetical index of words used in the Bible and the main Bible references where the word occurs. A good concordance will also help with original language study. In *Strong's*, for example, each English word is assigned a number that corresponds to the original Greek or Hebrew word. The Old Testament (Hebrew) words are numbered 0001—8674; the New Testament (Greek) words are numbered 0001—5624.

Examples include:

Kohlenberger, JR. 1991. *The NRSV Concordance Unabridged: Including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical*. Grand rapids: Zondervan.

Metzger, BM, Coogan, MD. (eds). 1993. *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Strong J 2009. *Strong's exhaustive concordance of the bible*. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers.

4. Commentaries:

Commentaries can be a huge help when you are studying the Bible. They can give us a lot of background information about the geography, the culture, the language, the weather, the biblical characters, the laws, and a multitude of other considerations that can make much more sense of the Bible and certain passages in particular. A Bible commentary is a series of notes explaining the meaning of passages of Scripture. Since a Bible commentary is written by human authors, it will reflect the beliefs and perspective of those writers. The advantage of a Bible commentary is that one can quickly gain perspective on the text's meaning, as understood by the commentary's author. One caution concerning Bible commentaries is that they should not be used instead of personal study; rather, they are designed for use in addition to personal study.

Examples include:

Adeyemo, T. (ed). 2006. *Africa Bible Commentary: A One-Volume Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Brown, RE, Fitzmyer, JA, and Roland E. Murphy, RE. (eds) 1999. *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. London: Pearson.

Gaebelein, F (ed). 1994-2004. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, 12 volumes*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Laymon, CM. (ed).1971. *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Walvoord, JF, Zuck, RB. 1983. *Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament & New Testament*. Colorado Springs: David C Cook.

5. Lexicons and Grammars:

The Bible manuscripts we have today are written in three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. These languages are not known by most of us today. A lexicon is a specialized foreign language dictionary that limits itself to a specific body of knowledge, e.g. the Bible. A word study is a lot more than simply looking up the original word of the manuscript and then finding a definition in your favorite lexicon. Bible lexicons provide definitions and meaning of Biblical words found in the original New Testament Greek and Old Testament Hebrew

languages of the Holy Bible. This study resource helps in understanding the origins and root meaning of the ancient language.

Certain passages of Scripture have multiple possibilities for meaning. Some translations footnote (usually one of) the grammatical options, but many do not. Grammars, which usually contain assist the exegete in describing and explaining features of the language found within the Bible.

Examples include:

Brown, CA, Driver, Rolles, S, Briggs, FS. 2000. *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon (electronic ed)*. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems.

Friberg, B, Mille, NF, Friberg, T. 2000. *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books.

Jenni, E, Westermann, C. 1997. *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers.

Koehler, JJ, Baumgartner, L, Richardson, Stamm, WMEJ. 1999. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (electronic ed)*. Leiden: Brill.

Spicq, C, Ernest, JD. 1994. *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers.

Thayer, JH. 2000. *Thayer's Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament*. Massachusettes: Hendrickson Publishers.

Gibson, RJ, Constantine, RC. 2017. *Biblical Greek: A Grammar for Students*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Jouon, P, Muraoka T. 2011. *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*. Pilotta: Gregorian and Biblical Press.

Kelly, PH. 1992. *Biblical Hebrew: An Introductory Grammar*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing.

Mounce, WD. 2009. *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

6. Journal articles:

Biblical study is an active field, and new material is always being published in scholarly journals. They are useful for many topics especially for detailed treatment of texts. They can be very difficult to read and usually should not be a student's primary resources.

Examples include:

[Acta Theologica](#): Open access to full contents of this journal (back to 2001). Some New Testament articles in many issues.

[Biblica](#): Full text availability for all; no subscription fee; general index 1990 — present; full text 1998 — present.

[Biblical Archaeology Review](#): Information and excerpts from the journal.

[Biblical Theology Bulletin](#): Searchable, free version of Biblical Theology Bulletin covering 2000 to the present located at [FindArticles.com](#). Articles can be emailed to you in their entirety, or they can be viewed in web-friendly or print-friendly versions. There are disadvantages: (1) Greek characters are not displayed; (2) contents cannot be browsed; (3) original locations are not referenced properly. But still very useful.

[Bulletin for Biblical Research](#): Free access (PDF) to most issues of this journal.

[Catholic Biblical Quarterly](#): Basic information only.

[Currents in Biblical Research](#): Basic Information; contents; abstracts. Free sample copy available, [Volume 3.1 \(October 2004\)](#) — PDF.

[Currents in Theology and Mission](#): Full text of volumes from 2002-3 freely available at the Find Articles web site.

[Journal of Biblical Studies](#): On-line journal; no subscription fee; so far Vol. 1-4 (2001-4); published occasionally.

[Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Technical articles from a variety of perspectives](#)

[Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Technical articles from a variety of perspectives](#)

[Journal of Religion and Popular Culture](#): Complete on-line journal; no subscription fee.

[Journal of Semitic Studies](#): Basic information, contents and abstracts; full text available to subscribers, 1996–present.

[Journal of Theological Studies](#): Full text on-line to subscribers from 2000 onwards (PDF); table of contents (HTML) 1996 to present.

[Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society](#): PDF access to articles Contents listing and some full-text articles from 1972-1999.

[Journal of Theology for Southern Africa](#): Contents listing and some full-text articles from 1972-1999.

[Near Eastern Archaeology](#): (formerly Biblical Archaeologist); information; abstracts; some on-line articles and reviews.

[Neotestamentica, Journal of the New Testament Society of South Africa](#): Basic Information; contents; subscription information; abstracts; sample articles; links.

[Novum Testamentum](#): Information (Brill) with links to the [on-line version](#) which provides full online contents to subscribers from 1995 onwards (including individuals whose institutions have subscribed) and free access to a particular volume for all (which changes from time to time).

[Religion and Theology](#): Unisa Press site covering Volumes 1-4 (1995-7) before it moved to Koninklijke Brill NV Leiden from Volume 5. Contents pages and some full-text reproductions of articles.

[Reviews in Religion and Theology](#): Contents and abstracts; subscribe for complete online editions (February 1999 to present).

[Review of Biblical Literature](#): The Society of Biblical Literature's on-line book review journal; free for all to view.

7. Recommended Websites:

<http://www.ntgateway.com>

- A very comprehensive and up-to-date website for Old and New Testament research.
- Here you will find many links for research on the specific New Testament books, Paul, the Synoptic problem, Historical Jesus and the Ancient World.
- Here you will find a wide variety of articles and study tools to use in your Old Testament studies.
- Look for the sub-section 'Tools and Resources' – here there are links to lists of journals, available e-books, and bibliographies.

<http://www.religion-online.org>

- More than 6000 articles and chapters.
- This site includes a wide range of subjects relevant to Theological studies.

<http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk>

- This website provides high quality theological material for Bible teachers and pastors.
- There are over 11000 free articles and books available for download.

<http://www.biblestudytools.com>

- Over 39 Bible translations as well as a Parallel Bible tool.
- Commentaries, concordances, encyclopaedias etc.

<http://www.biblos.com>

- Search, read and Study the Bible in many different languages.
- Parallel Bible Study Tool.
- Maps, concordances, dictionaries and encyclopaedias.
- Access to a Christian library with many writings, including the Church Fathers, Apocrypha, Studies, Children's Bibles and much more.

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