**Tips on writing an exegesis paper**

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Exegesis is an activity in which practically anyone can engage, but it requires *attending carefully to the tex*t. It may seem unnatural at first, but the more you practice doing it, the better you become at it. An exegesis paper requires two essential parts: a close, careful analysis of the text, and making an argument for a particular interpretation of the text. One of these parts without the other does not result in a good exegesis paper.

1. Begin with the biblical text and determine the focus of your work. Read through the relevant text (i.e. Romans) to select a pericope (short section of the text) as your focus. There are many ways to make a selection, including
   1. What seems to “jump off the page” to you? Ask yourself, why?
   2. Identify a text that compels you but its meaning is not transparent. In other words, you may choose a text not because you know what it means, but because the meaning is elusive and you’d like to explore it.
   3. Does the text trigger another topic, issue, or area of concern that are of interest to you? What is it and why?
   4. Are there passages you find problematic? For example, does it seem like Paul says one thing at the beginning of his letter and then seemingly says the opposite a few chapters later? The text could be problematic in other ways, e.g., does it represent a theology you find objectionable or challenging?
   5. Determine where the pericope begins and ends and articulate a reason(s) for that decision.
2. Work with your pericope in order to form your interpretation: Through study, analysis, and consulting other commentators, the goal is to formulate an interpretation that you will argue for in your paper.
   1. Note ideas, words, or themes that stand out to you.
   2. Formulate an essential question or problem you wish to address in the text, or a hypothesis that you will test as you do your work and develop your thinking about the passage.
   3. Note questions that arise for you as you read it, such as historical questions or other questions of interpretation that you may need answered in order to offer an interpretation.
   4. Question what seems “obvious.” In other words, don’t take things for granted.
   5. Situate your periscope within the context of the biblical book/letter/poem, and if relevant, within the context of a relevant strain of biblical literature.
   6. Be conscious of the perspective or approach you are taking. You may or may not appropriate a particular method that requires you to adopt a formal analysis (e.g., form criticism), but at a minimum, you must articulate the kind of approach you are taking. It is an over simplification but there are two categories for thinking about your approach:
      1. You offer an interpretation of the text informed by gender theory, a particular theological concern (substitutionary atonement?), or the problem of anti-Judaism, or religious pluralism, or an ethical concern. These are just examples, not a definitive list. Your thesis about the pericope would then be an interpretation that your perspective has enlightened.
      2. You adopt a method or framework from academic biblical criticism. Examples of such methods include form criticism, historical criticism, literary criticism, rhetorical criticism, etc. (This may not be a good way to go if you are not writing a research paper.)
   7. Consult three to five commentaries. If the paper is assigned as a research paper, follow the research guidelines.
3. Formulate your thesis or claim about the text. Do so in one or two sentences. Note the following:
   1. A thesis or claim is something about which you can “argue,” “analyze,” “claim,” “hypothesize.” If you “seek to,” “explore,” “consider,” “review,” “consider,” “discus,” or “describe,” you don’t have a clear thesis. Go back to step 2 to do more work on your ideas.
   2. Make sure you are not merely summarizing or paraphrasing the pericope. Make a claim for the text, such as how to understand the text differently in light of new information, from a new perspective, with a new methodological or theoretical lens, and so on.
4. Make a rough outline of your argument, so you know how the case you make will develop in the paper. (This is another stage at which some academic methods can help you organize your argument.) Generally speaking, the body of an exegesis paper will include a detailed analysis of the constituent parts of the text in question. It need not literally be verse-by-verse, but you should break the pericope down into constituent parts, which can then provide sections that appear consecutively in the paper. You should include a statement early on that describes your approach.
5. Plug your evidence into your outline. Rearrange points in your argument as necessary. Make sure you have a logical progression from one point to the next. Every word of the pericope is not equally relevant, so you must choose the elements that require the most attention and discussion.
6. Review steps 3–5 to determine if
   1. Your thesis fits the topic and assignment;
   2. Your thesis really is what you want to argue;
   3. Your outline is clear and logical, progressing from one point to the next;
   4. All your points are necessary and relevant to your argument;
   5. You have enough evidence to demonstrate your thesis;
   6. Your outline leads to your conclusion;
   7. Your conclusion agrees with your thesis.
7. Start writing your paper. Once you complete a draft, place it in the over at 350 degrees for 30 minutes to bake and allow your thoughts to blend together.
8. Read your rough draft out loud. Does it “sound” right? Imagine a reader who is not you—does your writing have sufficient clarity so that someone other than you can follow your argument? Are any sentences too long? Too short? Is the grammar correct? Does the argument progress in the way you expected it to? Are transitions in place between points? Do they make sense?
9. Read the paper with your outline next to it. Have you made all the points you planned to make? Do they work in the order you laid out? If you find you have deviated to a large extant from your original outline, then do a reverse outline of your paper (i.e., make an outline of the paper and see if it follows a logical structure.
10. Read the paper again, checking the grammar, spelling, logic, and flow of:
    1. Each sentence;
    2. Each paragraph; ask yourself if each paragraph has its own thesis and argument;
    3. Each page;
    4. The paper as a whole.
11. Before submitting your paper, make sure it conforms to the proper style: double-spaced, footnotes (or endnotes), bibliography (if required), margins, uniform fonts, etc.

**For Romans Winter 2017:**

Your paper should be 1200-1800 words. It is not a research paper, but you must consult 3-5 commentaries. I suggest trying to find some variety of approaches among the commentaries, and, where possible, find 1-2 where the approach is amenable to the one you are adopting in your paper.

Your paper will be evaluated according to the following criteria: 1) a well-articulated thesis; 2) the quality of evidence that supports that thesis—e.g., do you have compelling reasons for your interpretation; 3) quality of exegesis—did you pay close attention to the text, treating its various elements with care; 4) quality of writing, grammar, spelling, logic, etc.