Section One
What is Exegesis?

The Meaning of Exegesis

The term exegesis comes from the Greek verb exegeomia, which is composed of the preposition ek ("out of") and the verb hegeomai ("lead"). The Greek word literally means "lead out, show the way," but is used metaphorically to mean "relate, tell, report, describe." John 1:18 translates exegeomia as "explained," the Son explained the Father (NASB). This is exegesis. To exegete a passage of Scripture is to explain it, to lead the meaning out from the text and not bring a meaning into the text. The latter is eisegesis, from the Greek words eis ("in, into") and hegeomai ("lead").

Presuppositions and Exegesis

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16).

When studying, the exegete should be as objective as possible. Still, every exegete is shaped by his culture and background. This is unavoidable. The danger arises when these presuppositions tend to govern the exegete's interpretation rather than the interpretation correcting the presuppositions.1 The exegete must discern which presuppositions are unbiblical and then submit them to the Scriptures. We must be willing to let the Bible challenge our most cherished ideas and opinions and not vice versa.

The Intellect and Exegesis2

"... when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ" (Ephesians 3:4, NASB).

Reading requires the study of grammar and syntax. The words "grammar and syntax" cause many to cringe or grow anxious. Most did not learn to speak by studying these subjects and therefore do not see the need to study them now. The majority of people learn to communicate "through imitation, correction, and repetition. A child learns to use his

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1 Bernard Ramm, Protestant Biblical Interpretation, 115.

2 The primary reference for this section is John Piper, Biblical Exegesis, 11-12.
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Language by listening to advanced speakers (primarily parents), trying his own constructions, and receiving both direct and indirect correction. He learns by trial and error that words must be spoken in a certain order before he can be understood.\(^3\)

But the Word of God does not come to us today in spoken form. God has chosen to reveal Himself in a book. And since reading, good reading requires the study of grammar and syntax, the exegete must become knowledgeable in these subjects. Grammar and syntax may not be sensational. But if God humbled Himself by putting His Words in written, human language, woe to us if we arrogantly presume to ignore the grammar and syntax of Scripture.

However, it is not enough to say that the Word of God comes to us in written, human language. It also comes in the language of particular humans in particular historical settings. That is, when God spoke through men, He did not always do so with the same language, style, or vocabulary. Rather, God clothed His Words in the language, style, and vocabulary of individual Biblical writers.

Two crucial implications follow from this. First, since the Word of God comes to us through the particular language conventions at the time of the various human authors, then to grasp what these human authors meant to communicate in their particular historical situation is also to grasp God’s own intention for that situation. Hence, the exegete’s most immediate goal is to understand what the Biblical authors meant at the time they wrote, to see reality through another person’s eyes. Second, since the Word of God comes to us in written, human languages in particular historical settings, the exegete must make every effort to understand the Bible in light of the principles of grammar and the facts of history.

"If you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God” (Proverbs 2:4-5).

It is probably evident by now that exegesis is hard work. This is why many fail to study the Word of God. The issue is not that the Bible is dull but that we are lazy. Like playing basketball, some will be better at exegesis than others. But like shooting free throws, constant practice and perseverance will translate into competency and confidence. The exegete will learn to lead the meaning out of the text and reap the fruit of his labor.

\(^3\) Jeff Barbour and Rob Rugloski, An Introduction to English Grammar and Sentence Diagramming, xi-xii.
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The Affections and Exegesis

"... But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word" (Isaiah 66:2).

To handle the Word of God is a serious matter. The exegete should tremble at his trade. Otherwise, God has no regard for him even if he fills a library with books. There is no hope for the exegete who goes about his task lightly or flippantly.

"These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11).

The Scriptures aim to affect our hearts and change our attitudes toward God and His will. Therefore, when studying Scripture, the exegete must aim at the same thing. He cannot be content with merely understanding the text. His work cannot be purely intellectual and theoretical. Exegesis that does not sooner or later touch our affections is ultimately a failure because it does not produce the effect that the Scriptures ought to have. Theology must lead to doxology.

"The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart" (Psalm 19:8).

Studying the Word of God should be delightful rather than burdensome and boring. As the exegete's heart is gripped by Biblical truth, it will naturally worship.

"For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Romans 15:4).

The Scriptures were written for the purpose of producing hope. They provide the clear and certain promises of God in which to trust. Exegesis then is a catalyst for faith.

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4 The primary reference for this section is John Piper, Biblical Exegesis, 9-11.
The Holy Spirit and Exegesis

"Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:12-14).

There is an important distinction between the believer and the unbeliever, namely the believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit reveals things to the believer, as he studies, that will not be revealed to the unbeliever. The unbeliever is spiritually blind (2 Cor 4:4) and dead (Eph 2:1). This does not mean that the unbeliever cannot follow the grammar of the text. Nor does it mean that the believer will have the correct understanding of Scripture. Though the believing exegete may not be conscious of what has come from the Spirit and what has come from his effort, the Holy Spirit teaches the things of God and provides spiritual discernment.

Prayer and Exegesis

Prayer is one of the most neglected aspects of studying God's Word. Too often the exegete is so focused on the task at hand that he forgets how dependent he is upon God. Exegesis without prayer is presumption. Pray before, during, and after your time in the Word. Pray for a sharp mind. Turn Scripture into prayers. Pray as the Psalmist does in Psalm 119, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law … Make me understand the way of your precepts … Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes … Give me understanding … Incline my heart to your testimonies" (Psalm 119:18, 27, 33-34, 36)! Don't let me get used to what I'm reading! Let me see wondrous things, not just facts, or doctrines, or clever stories, but wonders!

Meditation and Exegesis

Most of the information we take in flows out of our heads like water down a drain. It is far too easy to close the Bible and not remember the words we have just read. Slow down and think deeply about what the text is saying. Let the truths of Scripture percolate into your brain. Like a tea bag in a cup of water, so should the Word of God be in the exegete's mind. Don't just dip the Scriptures into your mind. Let them soak.

5 The primary reference for this section is Donald S. Whitney, Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life, 48, 59-60.
The Disciplines of Biblical Studies

Exegesis is one of many disciplines in Biblical studies. The relationship between these disciplines is shown in the diagram below.

The Biblical Text

The exegete cannot begin to understand the author’s meaning until he has a text that corresponds significantly with what the author actually wrote. This is the objective of textual criticism. Textual criticism is the science of reconstructing, from the thousands of hand-copied manuscripts, a text of the Bible that comes as close as possible to the exact words of the original authors.

The Bible was written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Those who do not know these languages have to depend on textual criticism as well as translators. Without knowledge of the Biblical languages, the best an exegete can do is to understand the intention of the translator and then trust that this corresponds to the intention of the original author.
An Introduction to Exegesis
The Exegetical Pyramid

Therefore, it is the responsibility of the exegete using a translation of the Bible to be sure his translation is reliable.  

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Historical Background

Historical background deals with the setting of each book of the Bible. It provides information about the original readers’ history, culture, traditions, foods, clothing, society, religion, economics, politics, military, agriculture, structures, geography, and anything else necessary to grasp the meaning of the passage. Historical background will answer questions like: When and where did the events take place? Who are the people in the text? Who are the original readers and what were they like? When was it written? Where was the writer?

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation. It provides principles for sound exegesis. If we were to compare exegesis to a game, hermeneutics would be the rulebook. The importance of hermeneutics, then, should be obvious. Bad hermeneutics will lead to an incorrect interpretation. Many of the current Biblical controversies hang on questions concerning hermeneutics.

Biblical Exegesis

Biblical exegesis consists of drawing out the meaning of a given passage of Scripture by applying hermeneutical principles in view of the proper historical context. This is where the text is interpreted. Exegesis stands alone between the foundational disciplines below it and the practical disciplines beyond it. The exegete cannot jump from the Biblical text, historical background, and hermeneutics to application. Before they can be lived out, the Scriptures must first be understood.

6 John Piper, Biblical Exegesis, 15.
An Introduction to Exegesis
The Exegetical Pyramid

Biblical Theology

Biblical exegesis yields Biblical theology. Theology is the study of God. It comes from the Greek words theos ("God") and logos ("word, discourse, story"). Together, they mean the word, discourse, or story of God. Biblical theology is the study of God and His works contained in a specific book, writer, or era. For example, studying through Romans would be considered Biblical theology. Clearly then, Biblical theology is the fruit of exegesis. When studying Biblical theology, it is very important to keep in mind that revelation progresses. Some subjects are not revealed in their entirety in their first occurrence in Scripture.

Systematic Theology

Systematic theology is a methodical study of the different doctrines of Scripture. The word systematic comes from the Greek verb sunistano ("bring together, unite, collect"). Again, theology is the study of God. Systematic theology is a coherent statement of God and His works. This is similar to a topical study of the Bible, except that it is limited to what the Bible explicitly teaches. For example, studying dating would be a topical study because the Bible does not deal directly with the subject of dating. On the other hand, studying the love of God is considered systematic theology because there are numerous passages of Scripture that explicitly teach about the love of God.

Practical Theology

Practical Theology the act of drawing conclusions about life from one's Biblical studies. This includes application as well as preaching, teaching, discipleship, evangelism, missions, counseling, etc.

Practical Theology is the climax towards which the exegete works. But like ascending a mountain, the exegete can enjoy the pinnacle only after the climb. First, the text must be interpreted correctly. Then application can be drawn. A common error in many evangelical circles is to start with application. "It springs up in private or group Bible study where there is inadequate guidance provided by a leader of the group. 'This is what the verse means to me' is not a safe approach to Bible study. ... The Holy Spirit applies Scripture to individual lives in various ways, but without a reliable interpretation as a foundation for applications, there is no safeguard to assure the legitimacy of such applications. What often happens is a person comes up with an application for a passage, whether from the Holy Spirit or not is uncertain, that appears to help him in his Christian life. Because of the application's apparent helpfulness, he automatically assumes the correctness of an interpretation of the passage which is necessarily demanded by the application. Yet this interpretation may be clearly opposed to the principles of grammar and facts of history as they relate to that passage. Where did the error arise? It arose when considerations from personal experience were made the criteria for deciding the text's meaning." 7 Again, this is eisegesis.

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7 Robert Thomas, Introduction to Exegesis, 17.
"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:22-25, NIV).

Studying is not an end in itself. The exegete must move from the meaning of the text to the significance of the text. His life should be transformed by the truth he uncovers. He should strive to know the Biblical truth experientially and not just intellectually.
Section Three
From Exegesis to Exposition: The Sermon Building Process

Exegesis
What the text meant
Hermeneutics
Science, objective

Purpose Bridge
(Transcendent, Timeless Truth)

Central Proposition
of Text

Central Proposition
of Sermon

Structure of
Text

Structure of
Sermon

Study the
Text

Preach the
Sermon

Past

Particular

Historical

Present

Universal

Contemporary

Exposition
What the text means
Homiletics
Art, more subjective
Section Four
Key Terms

Hermeneutics
Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation. It provides principles or rules for sound Bible interpretation.

Exegesis
Exegesis is the implementation of valid hermeneutics. To exegete a passage of Scripture is to explain it, to lead the meaning out from the text and not bring a meaning into the text.

Homiletics
Homiletics is the science and art of sermon preparation. It is the process of finding the timeless truths in the exegetical data, presenting them, and applying them.

Exposition
Exposition is the act of setting forth the meaning of a text and its significance. It exposes the text using hermeneutics, exegesis, and homiletics.