

How to Write an Exegesis Paper

by Sherill Harriger

When I first heard the word exegesis I thought the person was saying "ex - a - Jesus". I was rather incensed to think that someone was going to "X out Jesus" or put an "X through Jesus;" then I learned the correct definition of the word. According to Webster an exegesis is an examination or critical interpretation of a text or the methods and approaches used to explain a text. Warner Southern College requires students to do at least two biblical exegesis papers, which always causes students to feel overwhelmed, anxious and panic stricken. Students neglect to carefully read the requirements and guidelines set up by the Biblical Studies Department for doing an exegesis. They look at the total picture instead of breaking down the paper, especially the main body, into the separate outlined sections and finishing each section before going on to the next.

The first thing to remember about an exegesis is that it is like any other scholarly paper because it contains an introduction, a main body, and a conclusion. The main body of the paper has to contain factual information that is documented by using the parenthetical author page citation method as outlined in the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. At least three college level scholarly sources are to be used when writing each section of the main body of the paper, avoiding references primarily used for writing sermons. The last page of the paper will be an alphabetical bibliography of all sources used in the paper. Exegesis papers are to be typed double-spaced with all scripture references coming from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

After completing the introduction to the paper the student has to tackle the main body, which is divided into two distinct sections. The first section is composed of an analysis of the setting or the passage in its historical and geographical context. First, one must verify who wrote the passage and discern the historical situation in which it was written. Next, determine exactly what was going on in the world at the time of the

writing and then consider to whom the passage was written. Also, it is important to look at the context of the passage in relation to the context of the Bible as a whole, the book in which it is located, and the material immediately surrounding the passage.

Remember that it takes scripture to help interpret scripture.

The second section of the main body of the exegesis is an analysis of the actual passage and each individual verse of the passage. This analysis should include word studies and a discussion of any peculiar grammar patterns. The Bible is a piece of literature; therefore, an exegesis would be incomplete if it did not define terms, consider the structure of the language, or the function of the various parts of speech. Also, it is important to determine in what form it is written. Is the passage prose or poetry, history or allegory, literal or symbolic, lament or hymn, law or diary, parable, sermon, or letter? Remember to look for the "literal meaning" or message of the text and not for what you think it should say or mean.

The conclusion of the exegesis paper is a discussion of the theological significance of the passage both for when it was written and for now. Students need to look at the passage and determine how it is relevant for today's society. In other words, what does it say to our present situation in life and what meaning does it have for us today. Is God trying to tell us something personally or is the message directed to the church or the world as a whole? This part of the paper does not necessarily need to be documented because it is to be written from the viewpoint of the person doing the exegesis.

Remember, when writing an exegesis it is important not to be intimidated by either the word, exegesis, or the content of the subject matter, the Bible. Calmly analyze the requirements for the paper and carefully follow the established guidelines looking for all required information. Don't even be thrown by differing opinions from different scholars because that is precisely what will make an exegesis more interesting to the reader.