“What is an exegetical paper?” is a question often asked by seminary students. Within this question, others are implied. What is the aim of an exegetical paper? How is an exegetical paper researched and written? Which sources and aids must be consulted? And perhaps most often implied, what do seminary professors expect from an exegetical paper? In any version, the question is fair and deserves a detailed answer, which is often not possible on the spot. This article seeks to give a more thorough answer.¹

Two limitations of scope are necessary to keep this guide manageable. First, this paper is not a step-by-step guide to exegetical method. The best resource for such is undoubtedly Gordon Fee’s, *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*, now in a third edition.² Needless to say, this article is a poor substitute for careful study of Fee’s guide. Rather, it is intended to be a quick refresher for those who have already taken a full introductory course on exegetical method. Second, this article seeks to be a practical guide to “essential tools” for writing NT exegetical papers. In other words, this mode asks: What are the essential elements of a good NT exegetical paper and which tools ought to be consulted for each element involved? With this aim in mind, many tools and resources are reviewed with some instruction on how to use them. The present article is divided into the following sections: preliminary considerations, general tools, exegetical tools, and tips for writing. Incorporated within the relevant sections is a bibliography with some annotations.

**PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS**

The following “preliminary considerations” are necessary, but the

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¹Steven S. H. Chang, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor of New Testament at TTGST.

²This article is specifically about the New Testament (NT) exegetical paper, rather than exegetical papers in general. While the theories and definitions might also apply to the Old Testament (OT) exegetical paper, the resources are specific to NT studies.

recommended resources do not directly aid the student in writing and researching an exegetical paper. Thus, these considerations should be addressed before writing and the resources in this section should not generally appear as supporting sources in an exegetical paper.

The Aim of the Exegetical Paper

The aim of the exegetical paper is to present the most plausible, well-supported translation, explanation and interpretation of a given passage, argued by means of rigorous research, critical judgment and accepted methods of biblical exegesis. This aim arises from the implied purpose of exegesis as an art or craft. Exegesis is often defined concisely as the task of “drawing out the meaning of” a biblical text. Drawing out the meaning is to determine what the original author said and why he said it, i.e. the “authorial intent.” Exegetical papers must seek to discover and to explain what the text meant for the original author and his readers. At the conclusion of an exegetical study, the student must offer the best understanding of what the biblical author intended to communicate to the first readers.

Exegetical Method

Learning the craft of exegesis is a hands-on task. Therefore, students need to practice exegesis with some regularity if they desire proficiency. Fortunately, there are resources to aid students on

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3For most seminarians and pastors, the practical purpose of exegesis is by and large the sermon. Consider the “Short Guide for Sermon Exegesis” in Fee, Exegesis Handbook, 133-154, where he takes the student through the process of exegesis but with an eye for the sermon. Good exegesis does not guarantee a good sermon—a good sermon is more than just good exegesis—but neither can a good sermon be born without good exegesis.


5Fee, Exegesis Handbook, 1. Limited space and scope do not allow for a discussion on the history of biblical interpretation or contemporary theoretical challenges to the enterprise of exegesis. It is in vogue to consider less important the original author or his intent. Rather the text has meaning on its own, apart from the author, or only what is read into it. Students who wish to investigate these issues of hermeneutics should consult W. W. Klein, et al., Introduction To Biblical Interpretation (Dallas: Word, 1993); G. R. Osborne, The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation (Downers Grove: IVP, 1991); A. C. Thiselton, New Horizons in Hermeneutics (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997).
exegetical method. As mentioned earlier, pride of place goes to Fee’s handbook. A more practical guide is Guthrie & Duvall, which offers exercises for diagramming especially. Gorman takes an “essential-elements” approach while Kaiser serves exegetical method for both testaments.


Several specialized guides to exegesis will richly repay careful study. Harris’s Exegetical Guide series, only available for Colossians and Philemon at present, promises to be an invaluable resource for guiding students grammatically and exegetically through the entire Greek NT. Similarly, Silva’s study of Galatians offers a good model for exegetical method. In a class by itself, Carson takes the student through common fallacies in exegesis and how to avoid them.


Other resources for mastering exegetical method or understanding the principles involved are available. Students who want to study in depth the theoretical foundations of biblical exegesis would do well to refer to some of the following resources.


Format and Styles

When writing exegetical papers, students must follow standards of format and style. In fact, most universities, seminaries and graduate schools have their own standards, but in North America, many of the arts and theological disciplines, including biblical studies, have for many years followed the *Chicago Manual of Style*, now on its 15th edition, and the version tailored for writing term papers and dissertations by Kate Turabian. Normally, students should consult only Turabian unless there is a style question for which it does not give an answer. Specifically for biblical studies, there is now a new standard developed by the Society of Biblical Literature in North America. The *SBL Handbook of Style* is based on the *Chicago Manual* and is designed specifically for writers and editors in biblical studies. Students writing exegetical papers will want to consult this guide for standard abbreviations to academic journals, references, commentary and monograph series, and ancient sources in relation to biblical studies.\(^6\)

One may also wish to follow the bibliographic and citation (footnote) formats of the *SBL Handbook* rather than Turabian since the former gives specific examples of citations for biblical research. At the end of the day, the differences between the two formats are minimal. A final

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\(^6\)Exegesists should be able to identify at least the following common abbreviations: for lexical aids, BDAG; BAGD; *TDNT*; *EDNT*; *NIDNT*; *TLNT*; for grammar, *BDF*; for dictionaries, *ABD*; *ISBE*; *DPL*; *DJG*; *DLNT*; for commentary series, *AB*; *WBC*; *ICC*; *NIGTC*; *NICNT*. Note that abbreviations of titles are italicized while those of series titles and authors/editors are not.
word must be said for consistency. Whether one prescribes to Turabian, *SBL* or others, one needs to be absolutely consistent with their citation and bibliographic formats. The student must follow one standard throughout and follow it meticulously.


Choosing the Passage

In an exegetical paper, the passage must be chosen carefully and the length should be manageable. It is impossible to do an exegetical paper of average length for a seminary course (between 15 to 25 double-spaced pages) on a passage more than ten verses. Only rarely and with good reason should a paper cover more than ten verses. Generally, an in-depth exegetical paper should be attempted on about five verses or less, or approximately one paragraph. In addition, the limits on either end of the passage should be carefully set. It is not always advisable to pick the first five verses of a chapter, neither is it always helpful to follow the paragraph divisions in the major translations.\(^7\) The best way to set the limits of a passage is to read the wider context several times over and while checking the Greek NT\(^8\) and as many English versions as possible.\(^9\)

GENERAL TOOLS

The tools and aids found in this section should be consulted while researching and writing the exegetical paper. However, they are in general all-purpose tools, which may or may not appear as supporting

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\(^7\)The NIV, for example, gives section headings based on content which are not always helpful in exegesis.

\(^8\)See how the editors of the Greek text (either NA\(^{27}\) or UBS\(^5\)) break up the paragraphs.

\(^9\)Generally, students tend to bite off more than they can chew. This initial error often leads to either shallow exegesis or very long papers! Thus, there is wisdom in starting with a manageable text, but there is added wisdom in revising the length if it is found to be unmanageable.
sources in the final product. The student will find less and less need for these tools as they become more familiar with exegesis and the NT as a whole.

Exegetical Terminology

Exegetical terms can be so esoteric as to leave one lost in the argot. It is, however, important to be familiar with exegetical terms, even if it is merely to use the best commentaries. Thankfully, there are accessible aids. Many students will herald the small size and concise definitions of IVP’s *Pocket Dictionary* series. With a broader aim yet still helpful is Soulen & Soulen. However, students who wish to master exegesis will want practically to memorize the relatively brief “Exegetical and Rhetorical Terms” appendix to Harris’s *Exegetical Guide*.


English Versions (Parallel and Interlinear Texts)

The student writing the exegetical paper will want to consult and use regularly the best English translations. This is because translations are more or less products of exegesis, and comparing one’s results with those of the translation committees of major translations is invaluable for verifying one’s results. In the first instance, students should be aware of the standard abbreviations for English versions such as KJV, RSV, NRSV, NASB, NIV, NLT, etc.

For an introduction to English versions, students will find Kubo/Speccht, Metzger, Comfort and Sheeley/Nash fascinating and essential reads that explain the origins and translation philosophies of the many English translations available today. Also an *Oxford Illustrated Histories* volume contains a section

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on “modern translations” which is a helpful presentation.


Various translation philosophies have produced versions of the NT that differ sometimes subtly and at other times radically. Generally, there are some versions that tend toward more literal renderings (e.g., ASV; NASB), others that tend toward freer or paraphrased renderings (e.g., LB; NLT), and still others that fall somewhere in between (e.g., NIV; RSV; ESV). In addition, there are those that represent Catholic traditions (e.g., NAB; NJB) and those that intentionally use gender-neutral language (e.g., TNIV, NRSV).

Parallel versions are useful because they place verses from several versions side by side so that the student need not have ten Bibles open on his or her desk! Oxford University Press publishes many good parallel bibles. Probably one of the best is *The Precise Parallel New Testament* because it includes the Greek text (UBS⁴) and seven of the most widely used versions. There are other parallel bibles to suit the specific needs of nearly everyone. Finally, Vaughan surveys twenty-six translations and lists the results phrase-by-phrase, verse-by-verse. Although somewhat dated, it is still useful.

*The Precise Parallel New Testament*. Oxford: OUP, 1995. [Includes UBS⁴, KJV, Rheims, AmpBible, NIV, NRSV, NAB and NASB; all 8 bibles can be read at once across two open pages.]


*Today's Parallel Bible*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000. [Includes NIV, KJV, NASB and NLT]

Interlinear texts place lines of a literal English translation under lines of the Greek text. In addition, some interliners may add both a literal word-for-word English definition and parsing information under each Greek word. Probably the best interlinear texts are by Marshall, Green and Douglas. Greek-English interlinear texts can be very helpful, especially for those who remember little Greek!  


**NT Introductions and Dictionaries**

Any exegetical study must consider the broader context, including questions of authorship and intended audience, dating and provenance, and overall purpose and theme of any given NT book. For this, students should consult the best NT introductions. Carson, Moo and Morris, and Guthrie more or less write from the evangelical perspective. A good beginner’s survey to the NT is the two-volume set called, *Exploring the New Testament*. In addition, the student should also be familiar with scholarly introductions from the mainstream. Highly recommended are the introductions by Kümmel, Ehrman and Brown.  


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\[1^1\] However, many instructors discourage students from using interlinear versions prematurely because they tend not to learn Greek grammar with the false hope that interliners will provide them with everything they need to know. Furthermore, interliners can also give the false impression that as long as one can translate a Greek text word for word (with the help of interliners!), she or he will understand the meaning of the passage. On the contrary, only through competent exegesis can the interpreter adequately understand the meaning of the original.  

\[1^2\] The student must read the given NT book straight through and several times if possible. There is simply no substitute for reading in the primary text of the NT.
conservative conclusions are generally upheld.]


Guthrie, D. *New Testament Introduction.* Downers Grove: IVP, 1990. [A standard conservative introduction now surpassed in popularity by Carson, Moo and Morris, this vol. is more comprehensive. Guthrie follows the canonical order with excurses on the Synoptic Problem, Form Criticism and the Captivity Epistles.]

Kümmel, W. G. *Introduction to the New Testament.* Nashville: Abingdon, 1975. [For a long time, the standard NT introduction preferred by mainstream NT scholarship. Conservatives would also do well to read Kümmel carefully.]


In addition, during the past several decades, the number and quality of reference works for biblical studies have grown. InterVarsity Press publishes a dictionary series called the *Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship* ¹³ that is indispensable for writing exegetical papers. These dictionaries are a good place to start for information on almost anything connected to the NT, including information about biblical authors, themes, settings and scholarly trends.


In addition, Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias are helpful and informative. While there are good one-volume dictionaries, such as Douglas and Wood, students writing exegetical papers should consult the best multivolume Bible dictionaries, which offer in-depth, scholarly articles. Pride of place goes to the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, which is

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highly rated for its thorough and up-to-date articles normally from mainstream scholars. Other recommended Bible references are the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* and the *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Both offer a wide variety of topics arranged in alphabetical order.\textsuperscript{14}


### Concordances

With the advent of the computer age, paper concordances\textsuperscript{15} are increasingly outdated and outdone! For those who still prefer paper over computer screens for whatever reason, there are several Greek concordances worth owning. Marshall recently revised a classic Greek concordance by Moulton and Geden, and is probably the best (and unfortunately most expensive!) at present.


Kohlenberger, J. R., et al., eds. *The Exhaustive Concordance to the Greek New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995. [A good and thorough concordance based on the UBS\textsuperscript{3}/NA\textsuperscript{26} text. A helpful index of articles, conjunctions, particles, prepositions and pronouns is found at the back.]

Marshall, I. H., ed. *Moulton and Geden Concordance to the Greek New Testament*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2002. [This revised version of a classic Greek concordance is set in a nicer Greek font than past versions and based on UBS\textsuperscript{4}.]

However, computer programs with sophisticated search features outdo paper concordances. Some of the most recognized programs are

\textsuperscript{14}Be sure to cite dictionary and encyclopedia articles individually (article title and individual author) when using them for exegetical papers.

\textsuperscript{15}A Greek concordance is an index of Greek words and their occurrences in the NT.
Bibleworks, Logos, and Gramcord for Windows PCs and Accordance for the Macintosh. In addition to simple word searches, these programs are able to search for particular grammatical and syntactical constructions. For example, one could look up all the occurrences of θεός that occur in the genitive case, in a particular construction, or in only the Johannine corpus, and so on. One can quickly see the advantage of these powerful computer tools. Finally, students on a minimal budget should consider free or very inexpensive Bible programs available on the Internet: e-Sword (PC) and Online Bible (PC/Mac). However, these either do not offer the most up-to-date translations or scholarly Greek texts, or offer them for purchase even though the program itself may be free.

**Bibleworks 6: A Software for Biblical Exegesis and Research.** [BibleWorks, LLC, P.O. Box 6158, Norfolk, VA 23508, USA; www.bibleworks.com; (757) 627-7100; retail $300; program is generally rated the best on the Windows OS side.]

**Logos Bible Software.** [Logos Bible Software, 1313 Commercial St., Bellingham WA 98225-4307, USA; www.logos.com; (360) 527-1700; scholar’s silver edition retail $1000; noted for the Libronix Digital Library system (www.libronix.com) which contains a vast digital library in addition to bibles.]

**Gramcord for Windows.** [The GRAMCORD Institute, 2218 NE Brookview Dr., Vancouver, WA 98686, USA; www.gramcord.org; (360) 576-3000; ultimate bundle $235; produced by the Gramcord Institute, a non-profit organization, often the best deal because of the many essential modules that come with the package.]

**Accordance 6.0 for Macintosh.** [Oaktree Software, Inc., 498 Palm Springs Drive, Suite 100, Altamonte Springs, FL 32701, USA; www.accordancebible.com; (877) 339-5855; scholar’s core bundle retail $200; highly rated program with a sophisticated search engine; also distributed by the Gramcord Institute.]

**e-Sword.** [www.e-sword.net; a free bible program for PC and the PocketPC platform.]

**Online Bible.** [www.online-bible.com; for PC and Mac platforms; generally free but a CD-ROM with many bibles is relatively inexpensive.]

Commentaries and Bibliographies

In an exegetical paper, it is essential for students who have first studied their verses thoroughly to consult and interact with the best

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16When using computer programs to generate data, which one might use in an exegetical paper, make sure that the data is accurate. Computers rarely make mistakes, but their human operators err regularly. Double-check the generated data by verifying search parameters and repeating the search a few times. Further, one should not cite data mindlessly as if this somehow makes the exegetical arguments more convincing. In other words, the information generated by computer programs must be processed and interpreted, before it is found to be relevant and significant to the exegetical task.
commentaries. However, commentaries vary in approach, size and quality, and so students should consult some helpful guides. Carefully sifting through the resources, Carson surveys and comments on the strengths and weaknesses of many commentaries individually. Glynn’s bibliographic survey goes beyond commentaries while Fee\textsuperscript{17} simply lists recommendations for each NT book.

In addition, students writing exegetical papers should consult works that more or less comment directly on the Greek text. Commentary series that have a reputation of this sort of approach are \textit{Word Biblical Commentary} (WBC), \textit{International Critical Commentary} (ICC), \textit{Hermenia} (Herm),\textit{ and New International Greek Testament Commentary} (NIGTC).\textsuperscript{21} Two series in particular are not based on the Greek text and yet offer good insights on the Greek (especially in the footnotes) are \textit{Anchor Bible} (AB) and \textit{New International Commentary on the New Testament} (NICNT). There are of course single volumes and some from lesser-known series that nevertheless ably work through the Greek text. Below is a table of recommendations for the best Greek-text commentaries in addition to recommendations by Carson and Fee.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NT</th>
<th>Carson\textsuperscript{22}</th>
<th>Fee\textsuperscript{23}</th>
<th>Greek Text\textsuperscript{24}</th>
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<td>Mt</td>
<td>Davies &amp; Allison C. Keener</td>
<td>Davies &amp; Allison D. Hagner</td>
<td>Davies &amp; Allison ICC D. Hagner WBC</td>
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<td>Mk</td>
<td>W. Lane M. Hooker</td>
<td>R. Guelich C.E.B. Cranfield</td>
<td>R.T. France NIGTC Guelich/Evans WBC</td>
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\textsuperscript{17}Fee, \textit{Exegesis Handbook}, 174-177.
\textsuperscript{18}Published by Word Books.
\textsuperscript{19}Published by T & T Clark.
\textsuperscript{20}Published by Augsburg Fortress.
\textsuperscript{21}Published by Eerdmans. There are other series which comment directly on the Greek text such as \textit{Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary} (Cambridge University Press) and \textit{Eerdmans Critical Commentary} (Eerdmans), but these are either disappointingly thin or sparsely published.
\textsuperscript{22}Carson, \textit{Survey}, 133-134. Limited to the first two recommendations.
\textsuperscript{23}Fee, \textit{Exegesis Handbook}, 173-177. Limited to the first two recommendations.
\textsuperscript{24}These are my recommendations for comment on the Greek text, limited to the two best in my opinion for each book of the NT. In some cases, one must refer to the footnotes for comment on the Greek.
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<th>B. Witherington III</th>
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<td>M.J. Harris NIGTC</td>
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<td>2Pet-Jud</td>
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Bibliographic aids guide students through the resources for exegetical study. Baker Book House publishes the *IBR Bibliographies* series, a collection of annotated bibliographies for the study of Scripture. Most helpful for the novice exegete is volume twelve, *NT Introduction*, which lists resources for exegetical method and language, historical backgrounds and commentaries. There are other excellent bibliographic resources of exegesis. Bibliographies for exegesis are provided in Fee and Guthrie/Duvall while Glynn was mentioned above.

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Bauer is up-to-date, covers the whole Bible, and ably annotates a handful of the best (in his view) resources in each category. Douglas puts together the sources recommended by the faculty of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, USA. Hagner and Fitzmyer produce excellent bibliographies as individuals.

[A must read for anyone writing an exegetical paper or sermon, and need solid advice on commentaries. Consult this guide before purchasing any commentary!]


[An up-to-date bibliographic survey by a seminary graduate. Gives suggestions on building a personal reference library.]


EXEGETICAL TOOLS

Contrary to the “general tools” discussed in the previous section, the exegetical tools listed below are particular to each element of research that must be incorporated in the exegetical paper. These sources should be cited more or less directly for support of one’s exegetical arguments.

Tools for Textual Criticism

Textual criticism is important for the exegetical paper, but not all variants26 are of equal exegetical value, or even exegetically significant. The process of determining which variants are significant for exegesis can be complex and only adequately learned with experience. Greenlee is a good introduction while Metzger is an excellent history of textual

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26“Variants” or variation units are different renderings of texts in separate manuscripts (or copies).
criticism as an enterprise. Other good introductions and studies of text-critical theory are Ehrman/Holmes and Epp/Fee.


Students should use one of two critical (and virtually identical) Greek NT texts: the Nestle-Aland 27th edition (NA27) and the United Bible Societies 4th revised edition (UBS4). These eclectic versions incorporate the best and most thorough collection of manuscripts to identify the most likely original. The textual apparatus of NA27 is more elaborate than is UBS4’s, which is meant for translators more than textual scholars. However, the UBS4 text comes with a companion volume, which explains how the UBS committee determined the original.

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28 There are well over 5,000 manuscripts of varying lengths of the NT from which scholars try to determine the original autographs (or the original form).

29 The textual apparatus is the footnote sections that list the manuscripts and the variants found in them.

30 While NA27 is more thorough and trusted by scholars, I generally recommend divinity students toward UBS4, unless they are planning for postgraduate degrees in NT studies. There are several reasons for this recommendation. Firstly, UBS4 tends to be more usable for day-to-day exegetical work for sermons and papers. Because UBS4 was created with translators in mind, the variants discussed have been filtered down to those that most often might affect meaning. Secondly, the UBS’s textual apparatus gives a rating to each variant that corresponds to the level of certainty. These ratings are A, B, C and D, with A being most certain and D being least certain. In addition to this rating system, the editors explain their decision in a companion volume, offering a textual commentary to the UBS4 text. Both are highly usable and make the process of working through the Greek textually a reasonable task. Finally, UBS4 contains a usable Greek dictionary that more than make up for its inferior textual apparatus.

Metzger, B. M. *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994. [A companion to UBS⁴, it explains why one reading was chosen among the variants for each variant.]


For the exegetical paper, students should consult the textual apparatus of the UBS⁴ (or the NA⁷) text, and at least make an attempt to show awareness of the variants and how the specific variant was established (whether one’s own or UBS/NA’s). While there are other technical sources that might be conferred with, they are normally reserved for more technical papers on textual criticism.

In addition to the standard Greek texts of the NT, those studying a pericope³¹ in the gospels should consult Aland’s synopsis, preferably in the original Greek.

Aland, K., ed. *Synopsis of the Four Gospels: Greek-English Edition*. New York: United Bible Societies, 1979. [Highly recommended for studies in the Gospels, the Greek is the UBS³ while the English is the RSV.]


**Tools for Lexical Analysis**

As students work through a text, they will encounter important Greek terms for which they will need more information. For this, they will need lexical aids. The standard Greek-English lexicon for NT studies is BDAG, now in a third edition. Good exegetical papers should consult this work initially and regularly. In addition, one may consider a translation lexicon such as Nida/Louw or a broader Greek-English lexicon such as Liddell/Scott.


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³¹ A “pericope” is a short form or story unit in the gospels.
should be a part of every student’s library. This new edition, published in 2000, first offers basic meanings of words generally under each entry, in addition to meanings in specific occurrences. Thus, it is useful for a quick survey of the semantic range of any Greek word.]

Liddell, H. G., et al. *A Greek-English Lexicon.* 9th rev. ed. Oxford: OUP, 1996. Or Liddell, H. G. *Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon.* 7th ed. Oxford: OUP, 1959. [In both full and shorter version, Liddell/Scott is useful for understanding how NT words were used in classical Greek and in non-Christian literature. However, be careful not to import blindly the information from this source into the NT. Access to this lexicon is available on the Perseus Digital Library site of Tufts University. To go directly to the Greek and Latin tools page, see http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/resolveform (accessed on July 20, 2004).]


A survey of lexical data from non-literary Greek sources is also important, especially for Koiné Greek. Some of the latest in lexical studies from Greek inscriptions and papyri are made accessible in a series called, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity,* presently in nine volumes. These are best approached through the scripture and word indices for each volume, and in volume five.


In addition to lexical sources, careful consultation of theological dictionaries is an essential element of NT exegetical papers because they contain in-depth discussions about the meaning and significance of important Greek terms, and often condense a vast amount of information into concise articles. The monumental ten-volume Kittel or *TDNT* is still the standard in most respects. With more concise articles is the four-volume *NIDNTT,* which is divided into theological articles under English words and word groups. The Greek-word index is helpful in volume four. In addition, *EDNT* and *TLNT* are generally shorter, but equally insightful.


**Tools for Grammatical Analysis**

A good knowledge of Greek grammar and the best grammatical references are essential to the exegetical paper. The grammatical analysis therefore should contain a broad consultation of the best Greek grammars available. The reference grammar preferred by most scholars is undoubtedly *BDF*. Evangelicals are warming up to the intermediate-advanced grammar by Wallace. Also worth consulting are the reference grammars by Moulton and by Robertson, and a shorter Catholic work by Zerwick.

Blass, F., et al. *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Writings*. 32 Grammar deals with how words or word groupings are put together and relate to one another. The analysis of the inflections of words is normally called morphology and that of the interrelationships of words is called syntax. See Fee, *Exegesis Handbook*, 71-78, for methods of grammatical analysis.

33 However, there is no substitute for a basic knowledge of Greek grammar such that one is able to identify the parts of speech and begin to understand significant grammatical elements. Thus, it is virtually impossible to do adequate work in this area without first having taken a course on basic Greek grammar. The standard basic grammars are J. Gresham Machen, *New Testament Greek for Beginners* (rep. ed.; Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1998); W. D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek: Grammar* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003); and J. W. Wenham, et al., *The Elements of New Testament Greek with Audio CD Pack* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001).

34 Reference grammars cover all (or most) aspects of grammar, and are usually much longer.
Literature. Chicago: UCP, 1976. [BDF: A highly respected and recommended grammar for intermediate to advanced students.]


In addition to reference grammars, there are specialty grammars, which concentrate on verbs, idioms or other aspects of Greek grammar. Especially for verbs, one should consult Burton, Fanning and Porter. For Greek idioms, one should check with Porter and Moule while for prepositions, Harris’s article in NIDNTT is a must.


Harris, M. J. “Appendix: Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament.” In NIDNTT 3:1171-1215.


Students who require a bit more help with grammatical analysis will be grateful for the third category of analytical aids. A companion volume to Zerwick’s grammar is Zerwick and Grosvenor. The analysis is verse by verse, with significant constructions explained and keyed to Zerwick’s grammar. A similar but more comprehensive approach is taken by Rogers and Rogers in the revised and expanded version of Rienecker and Rogers. Both are useful as tools to work through a passage, but Rogers and Rogers is keyed to BGAD, to most major grammars, and to general research on the exegetical issues of each verse.

Tools for NT Backgrounds

An adequate understanding of NT backgrounds[^35] is critical to proper exegesis. This is because original meaning cannot be separated from its real-world context—i.e., the social, political, cultural, economic and religious worlds in which the NT texts were written and first understood.

As of first importance to NT backgrounds, students should be acquainted to the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint; LXX),[^36] the scripture of the NT writers. Essential are a critical version of the LXX (Ralphs), a good Greek-English LXX lexicon (Lust et al.) and a LXX grammar (Conybeare).

For general background information, there are several initial aids to consult. Three highly accessible background commentaries are the *IVP Bible Background Commentary*, the *Bible Knowledge Background Commentary*, and the *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*. These volumes provide basic comment on background material for every chapter or paragraph of the NT and point students in

[^35]: “Backgrounds” refer to the world or setting behind the NT, including social and political structures, culture, religion and economy, among other aspects. It is not so much the specific context that directly forms the reason for the NT text, e.g. the Corinthians situation that prompted Paul to write the Corinthian letters. Some refer to this as the “foreground.”

[^36]: The Septuagint (or LXX) is the Hellenistic Greek translation of the OT.
the right direction.


However, research for exegetical papers should go beyond these background commentaries. A good place to begin is *DNTB*, which has articles organized topically and alphabetically. For general backgrounds, one will also do well to consult Ferguson’s *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* and encyclopedia. For literary backgrounds, Aune’s dictionary is a helpful resource. The best way to approach these resources is through the indices and with some idea of which background is most relevant for one’s passage. True familiarity with backgrounds can only be achieved through first-hand reading of primary texts and for this, the only manageable resource for students is Barrett.


Ferguson, E. *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*. 3d ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. [A standard introduction to the social, political, military, economic, religious and cultural backgrounds of the NT. A must read for anyone wishing to know more about NT backgrounds in general or specific aspects.]

Other secondary sources\textsuperscript{39} are a bit more focused or simply a collection of essays on various backgrounds. An excellent set on Acts is \textit{The Book of Acts in Its First-Century Setting}. Another admirable set on various backgrounds of the NT is the \textit{Library of Early Christianity} edited by Meeks. For two collections of learned essays on various backgrounds, see Ferguson and Evans/Porter. For Jewish backgrounds, Scott and Fitzmyer are good places to begin. For Greco-Roman backgrounds, a good initial resource is Jeffers. Finally, study of backgrounds for exegetical papers can only be furthered in a well-equipped seminary library and with good bibliographic resources. Learn to find relevant sources for backgrounds using bibliographic resources and indices.

\textit{The Book of Acts in Its First-Century Setting}. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. [\textit{AICS}: There are 5 vols.: B. W. Winter & A. D. Clarke, eds., \textit{Ancient Literary Setting} (Vol. 1; 1994); D. W. Gill & C. Gempf, eds., \textit{Graeco-Roman Setting} (Vol. 2; 1994); B. Rapske, \textit{Paul in Roman Custody} (Vol. 3; 1994); R. J. Bauckham, ed., \textit{Palestinian Setting} (Vol. 4; 1995); I. Levinskaya, \textit{Diaspora Setting} (Vol. 5; 1996). The projected 6\textsuperscript{th} vol. on the theological setting will not be published apparently.]


\textsuperscript{39}A “secondary source” in our context is a book about a primary text such a commentary on Philemon or an essay about Roman households. Thus, all writings about the NT are considered secondary sources.
Tools for NT Theology

While the theological dictionaries have already been covered in the lexical section, a follow-up section on the tools of NT theology is necessary because exegetical papers should include research into the theological significance of a given passage, how the passage, phrase or word fits into the theology of the authors and their message(s). Evangelicals by-and-large prefer Ladd, Guthrie, and Morris, but the last is more readable while the first two are more of reference length. The addition by Marshall promises to be good. Schlatter was a conservative German scholar whose works have only recently been translated into English. From the mainstream, Caird is highly regarded. In addition, there is the NT Theology series published by Cambridge University Press on various NT subdivisions.


Guthrie, D. *New Testament Theology*. Downers Grove: IVP, 1981. [Guthrie's approach is thematic, covering a host of traditional themes (God, Christ, Salvation, etc.) and working through the major sections: Synoptics, Johannine, Pauline, Hebrews, Petrine and Revelation.]


There are other specialty theologies of the NT that focus either on individual authors or on specific aspects of NT theology. Space does not allow for a comprehensive list. However, a sampling of some of the most significant is presented below.


### TIPS FOR WRITING

Once the student has consulted the essential tools and properly understood and processed the findings, he or she is ready to write the exegetical paper. However, good writing (or thinking!) must be learned and takes hard work. Without adequate writing ability and concentrated effort, it is impossible to write good exegetical papers. Again, there are helpful resources to aid the student. Even a casual read from any of the following resources will help. However, students who have little experience or confidence in writing research papers for one reason or another should consider these aids more carefully.


In this final section, several practical tips are suggested particularly for writing exegetical papers that merit high marks.

(1) *Work from the Greek text.* Papers that reflect little or no direct study of the Greek are not exegetically satisfactory. There must be evidence that the student has grappled with the original language. Of course, this does not mean that one should string together quotations of Greek verse. Rather, using the essential tools aforementioned, work through the grammatical, lexical and textual data and show that one has considered the original language, which is essential to understanding the author’s original intent.

(2) *Ask and answer.* The purpose of any research paper is to ask the proper question and to answer that question. If one does not have a question, the paper has no purpose and therefore not worth writing or reading. In an exegetical paper, the main question is already present: What did the text originally mean? Or how is the passage best interpreted given the historical and cultural distance between modern reader and ancient writer and his text? However, the student must formulate relevant sub-questions based on the details of exegesis, such as questions of words, grammar, theology and so forth, and while interacting with the secondary sources. Furthermore, answering the questions posed is essential to the task. As the student writes, he should constantly reflect upon whether or not he is satisfactorily answering the questions set forth or implied in his presentation.

(3) *Disagree and argue.* Many students have difficulty evaluating the arguments of scholars because they have an unrealistic view of the ability (or infallibility!) of scholars. They tend to think that academics must know better and so students and laymen should not disagree with them. However, scholars are only human and the best of them often make poor judgments or work from flawed frameworks (with bad presuppositions or assumptions), all of which must be critically evaluated. Therefore, students should not be afraid to disagree with the scholars. Still, students must offer credible and solid reasons for their disagreement and argue their point with supporting evidence. This is critical for the well-written exegetical paper.

(4) *Be fair-minded.* Students often tend to be too emotive when writing exegetical papers on problem texts especially. Emotion is
essential to a good sermon but it is distracting in an exegetical research paper. It is not wrong to deal with emotional issues in biblical interpretation such as the women’s issues (1 Cor 14:34; 2 Tim 2:12) or the millennium issue (Rev 20), but too much emotion gives the impression that one’s conclusions were determined more by sentiment than by the evidence. Furthermore, be careful to avoid overstating the significance of one’s supporting arguments and conclusions. Students should learn to be even-handed when evaluating the positions of other interpreters and learn to criticize their argumentation and evidence rather than their traditions or persons.

(5) Read widely. An exegetical paper is a particular type of research paper and as such, one must consult as many sources as possible. Students must spend the time and effort to read often and broadly when researching for an exegetical paper. Showing that one has read widely lends credibility to one’s arguments and conclusions. In essence, the overall purpose of this present article is help students read with sufficient breadth to write high-quality exegetical papers.

(6) Be meticulous. Good exegetical research papers must be meticulous, being careful to get the details correct in all respects. This begins with good English style, but also covers proper citations and formats. At the heart of meticulousness is consistency. Careless mistakes and inconsistencies take away from the credibility of the paper and its conclusions.

(7) Revise. Good writers regularly contend that there is no good writing but only good re-writing. Thus, they promote the importance of revising what one has written. Much of the meticulous consistency encouraged above is achieved when one revises. Once the research and writing is completed, the student will do well to reread and revise several times.

Finally, seminary students who take the time to write excellent exegetical papers will learn how to interpret the NT at a deeper, more sophisticated level. They will learn how to evaluate translations, commentaries and other learned sources. And what they learn will be remembered long after lectures and examinations have been forgotten. Hence, when they become busy pastors, they will be better equipped to be careful about their sermon preparation because of the experience of writing thorough exegetical papers. The hope of this article is that seminary students would learn to handle the New Testament as the Word of God with confidence and competence. Soli Deo gloria.