

Research and resources

Have you ever been to high school yet? Have you ever been to college yet (or CEGEP if in Quebec)? Have you ever been to a seminary or a specialized institution yet? Have you been to university yet? If so, you should have learned, especially at university, that one must absolutely read more than one resource when conducting research. One must at least go through three or several (or better, dozens) of resources in order for a research to be considered acceptable. The reasons are fairly simple: **if you don't go through several resources, you run the high risk of missing important information, or important counter-arguments, and you run the risk of becoming one-sided or short-sighted.** As in any field of study, there are always multiple, slightly differing points of view and, at times, even opposing points of view. This is why we must go through several or dozens of resources to conduct research. Now, this applies mostly if one initiates a research. This might not apply if you've already done research about the same subject and you are now simply adding one or a few more resources for consideration, or to stay updated. It's especially vital when one initiates some research for the first time.

Let me clarify, once again (lest I be accused of making the Bible inaccessible to people that don't do research), that everything I'm sharing on this blog under XegesIs is about research. I'm not suggesting that the Bible cannot be read and understood at a basic, superficial level. Anyone can read and understand the Bible overall—in any language. I'm thinking not only in terms of North American English, French or Spanish, but anywhere in the world in any language. I'm thinking here about evangelism and missionary work. This has been the case for hundreds of years. However, recall, or be made aware, that for the same thousands of years, humanity has also experienced schisms, divisions, sects, cults, etc. We now have Catholics (a variety), Protestants (a variety), Muslims (a variety); we also have Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Adventists, etc. Why? It's because of reading and understanding—it's because of experiences and **interpretations!** Let me go back, then, to research and resources.

Different kinds of resources

What are resources? These could come in a variety of form factors: document, video or audio. Within these form factors, there can be a variety of each: books, articles, conferences and interviews. There's even a greater variety: monographs (specialized

books), dictionaries (a variety), lexicons (a variety), encyclopedias (a variety), commentaries (a variety), Master of Arts theses (MA theses), Doctor of Philosophy theses (Ph.D. theses), non-peer review articles and peer-review journal articles, academic and non-academic conferences (in transcripts, audio or video), scholarly and non-scholarly interviews, podcasts and other informal media. There are a lot of resources! These are all accessible via the Internet—at your fingertips!

However, there are problems. It's not so easy and evident. As I've said in my previous blog post, one might find outdated, refuted and invalid resources published on the Internet. There is also junk, but normally Christians are able to detect the junk since it stinks! There are questions to ask yourself relating to these issues on which resources on the Internet (or at your local library) are worth your attention:

- **When was it published?** Was it published 100 years ago? 50 years ago? Last year? This year? It matters because it might be outdated. But, of course, this is not the sole criteria. *Not everything that is old is wrong and not everything that is new is right.*
- **Who published it?** Was it self-published or published through a recognized institute or university? Is it written by [a] recognized scholar[s] or by a nobody, or an amateur, or a self-professed scholar with no real credentials? It matters because it shows and validates credibility. But certainly, this is not the sole criteria. Simply because a resource is self-published doesn't mean that it's not reliable at all. For instance, Dr. Michael S. Heiser published both kinds, but it doesn't matter much in this particular case because he is a recognized scholar and his monograph(s) are not self-published. It's only his short, beginners' books that are self-published. His more scholarly resources were reviewed and published by Lexham Press (Sept. 1, 2015), and it's based on his doctoral dissertation (Ph.D. thesis).
- **Was it peer-reviewed?** If so, which peer review journal? Not all are created equal. There are some journals out there that are very idiosyncratic. Conversely, there are journals that are more international and prestigious.
- **Has it been well received by recognized experts?** To know this, one needs to get into journals and be more aware of conferences and podcasts produced by scholars. Simply because a new interpretation is not well received doesn't signify that it's wrong, but the probability that it's on target diminishes and it might require more careful revision.

- **Has it been criticized and, if so, how?** Ditto. To know, one needs to get into it. What are the criticisms? What are the arguments back-and-forth?
- **Has it been refuted?** Ditto. To know, one needs to get into it. There have been examples in the past where after a number of years or decades, some views get completely refuted over and over again by competent, recognized scholars. To know this, you have to become familiar with, and follow, the literature.

You might think that I'm forgetting primary sources (the ancient texts themselves). Of course, one must become familiar with the primary sources. Do not only rely on secondary sources and commentaries, but read the texts carefully yourself. However, a lot of the resources above do show you the primary sources and comment on them. Nevertheless, run through the primary sources yourself first before you consider secondary sources. It's a basic exegetical principle. Unless you are in a hurry and you want to offer a quick answer to a basic question!

I've met some believers and unbelievers alike that want to run with a particular viewpoint simply because they read one book or one article out there, or they saw one YouTube video, that supposedly prove their current understanding. This is something that we must all learn to avoid. But it's telling when someone finds out that I'm well versed in Biblical Studies and that they show unfamiliarity. I become very skeptical, although I tend nowadays to no longer get into arguments in person. But the converse is true: It's telling when I meet or face someone who appears more versed than I am, and I then retract and become more careful with what I say. We all have to learn to recognize our limits. I can now easily detect if someone is not well learned in a field of study that I know I handle better, but I equally recognize fairly quickly when someone is more competent than I am in another area.

I know very little about cars. Imagine I bring my damaged car to some car mechanics and I start contradicting and correcting them about my car engine and parts! They will very quickly detect that I'm not well knowledgeable about cars, and they will readily tell that I have no experience repairing cars. I then look foolish, uninformed, unexperienced and I lose all credibility. The same goes for any other field of practice or study out there.

Professor Larry W. Hurtado recently published a blog post that you should read, "[Knowledge based Opinion and Honest Questions.](#)"