

# What are Hermeneutics and Exegesis?

I have already explained what Hermeneutics and Exegesis are in my own words in the post entitled "XegesIs Introduction." I here cite a few biblical scholars that define in their own words what Exegesis is. The first is Dr. Scot McKnight, Julius R. Mantey Chair of New Testament. He is a Professor at Northern Seminary in Lisle, Illinois. Dr. McKnight states:

“In general, the purpose of exegesis is to determine, with reasonable probability, the intention of the author as he has made that intention known in the text in its historical context.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> For defense of this definition, see E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1967); W. C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 23–36.

Scot McKnight, *Interpreting the Synoptic Gospels* (vol. 2; *Guides to New Testament Exegesis*; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 16.

Last, but not least, there is the well-recognized Grant R. Osborne (1942 – November 4, 2018). He recently passed away this past November. He was Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. In his book "The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation (2006)," Dr. Osborne explained:

“Exegesis means to “draw out of” a text what it means, in contrast to eisegesis, to “read into” a text what one wants it to mean. The process is complex and forms the heart of hermeneutical theory, which seeks first to determine the author’s intended meaning (see appendixes 1 and 2 for the possibility of doing so) and then to apply it to one’s life. This is a single task, and the two aspects—meaning and significance—cannot be separated, since the determination of meaning (what it meant) is already done from the standpoint of modern perspectives or significance (what it means). Nevertheless, these are still differing aspects of the larger hermeneutical whole, so I will devote chapters two to five to general hermeneutics (that is, meaning—what the biblical text “meant”) and chapters fifteen to eighteen to applied hermeneutics (that is, significance—what Scripture “means” to us today). Werner Jeanrond calls these different reading perspectives, that is, different purposes or goals that are not mutually exclusive but work together to produce understanding (1988:126–28). Exegesis proper could be subdivided into linguistic and cultural aspects. The former is concerned with the alignment of terms or concepts that together form the

propositional statements. The latter relates to the historical and sociological background behind those statements.”

Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Rev. and expanded, 2nd ed.; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 57.

From Dr. Osborne's explanation of Hermeneutics and Exegesis, it appears that Hermeneutics is more of a high-view of historical context, book genre, and grammar, whereas Exegesis focuses more on extracting details out of word studies, grammar, syntax, and cultural background.

Elsewhere, in the same book, Dr. Osborne clarifies:

“Ambiguous or unknown terms, grammatical errors or hidden agendas within the communication process often restrict rather than aid meaning. This is why human beings so very often fail to communicate with one another. They define terms differently, unintentionally (or intentionally) mislead or simply speak from a perspective completely different from that of the hearer or reader. The task of exegesis is to uncover such communication lapses in a text and to try to recover the original intended meaning of the author.”

Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Rev. and expanded, 2nd ed.; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 114.

In any case, it's clear that anyone can read the Bible and understand its basic Message and messages. But, when it comes to teaching or debating specific controversial passages, phrases or words, Hermeneutics and Exegesis proper are not easy tasks to undertake.

Frederick William Danker was a New Testament scholar and a renown koine Greek lexicographer. As Danker said in one of his books about changes in biblical lexicography and its difficult challenges:

“Change spells pain, but ... scholar’s tasks are not for sissies.”