

**NEW
TESTAMENT
EXEGESIS**

THIRD EDITION

A HANDBOOK FOR
STUDENTS AND PASTORS

GORDON D. FEE

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PREFACE

I WELCOME THE PUBLISHER'S INVITATION to offer this third edition of *New Testament Exegesis*, which is appearing in conjunction with the third edition of Douglas Stuart's *Old Testament Exegesis* (see Preface to First Edition). The major "revisions" to this edition are bibliographical—an enormous amount of new literature and Internet resources have appeared in the last ten years. At the same time, the basic UBS/Nestle-Aland Greek text has appeared in a new revision (UBS⁴ and NA²⁷ respectively), as has a newly, considerably revised edition by Frederick W. Danker of the basic Greek lexicon—known by all as "Bauer" but now to be known as BDAG. This means that Sections II.2 ("Establishing the Text") and II.4 ("The Analysis of Words") have been rather thoroughly revised to reflect these new editions, facsimiles of which have also been included.

Books of the kind edited by I. H. Marshall (see Preface to First Edition) and Black and Dockery (Preface to Second Edition), which offer helpful essays on all kinds of matters related to interpreting the New Testament, continue to be forthcoming. I call attention to these two:

Joel B. Green (ed.), *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995).

Stanley E. Porter (ed.), *Handbook to Exegesis of the New Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997).

I have also elaborated or revised the earlier editions at two significant points. First, at Step 8 (and Section II.5 of Chapter II), I have rewritten large portions of the section to include the flourishing of two dimensions of this task: social science criticism (understanding the culture through the eyes of sociological study) and intertextuality (listening to the “echoes” of the OT in the NT writers, as well as their direct citations). Second, I have rewritten Step 11 (G) to put more emphasis where it belongs: on the evangelist’s own narrative.

Since this book assumes that the biblical books have “authors,” and that the view of an author counts for something in the exegetical process, I have added an Appendix to this edition with a brief discussion of this presupposition in light of some postmodern theories of “interpretation” that begin with the reader and tend to negate the concept of “author” altogether.

As always, I am indebted to others for help of various kinds: to Carey Newman, editor at Westminster John Knox Press, who initiated this process and who encouraged me with generous support when the deadline had to be delayed because of surgery; to my former teaching assistant, now assistant professor of New Testament at Fuller Seminary, Rick Beaton, who helped bring me up to speed on computer-aided research (as he did regularly some years ago as my TA!); and to my Regent colleague, Loren Wilkinson, professor of Interdisciplinary Studies, who took the time to read and critique the Appendix.

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

A FORMER NEW TESTAMENT COLLEAGUE was once asked by a student how he could learn to do exegesis, intending that his teacher should suggest a book. My colleague answered, "You will just have to take a course." That answer is the tacit admission of what all of us who teach NT know to be true: There simply is no book that serves either as a textbook or a guide for students to learn the exegetical process, from the opening of their Bibles to the writing of the paper. This book hopes to fill that lacuna.

There are, of course, some useful books available for those who do exegesis. The closest to the kind I have tried to write is by Otto Kaiser and Werner G. Kümmel, *Exegetical Method: A Student's Handbook*, rev. ed. (Seabury Press, 1981). But these are essays, not student guides. The book is useful to a degree, but as anyone knows who has tried to use it as a text, it is much too general for classroom purposes. A useful handbook by John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay has recently appeared: *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook* (John Knox Press, 1982). It covers both OT and NT in the same chapters and approaches the task from the perspective of the various critical procedures.

Two other recent books are especially useful to help the student/pastor to understand the various concerns and methodologies that go into the exegetical process for the NT: I. Howard Marshall

(ed.), *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), 406 pp., and Daniel J. Harrington, *Interpreting the New Testament: A Practical Guide* (Michael Glazier, 1979), 149 pp. Either of these books would serve as a good companion to the present book, since they elaborate in considerable detail some of the methodological concerns that are treated in a more “how to” fashion here.

My own reasons for writing this book are several. First, in all my own years of training, I was never taught how to do exegesis. Part of the reason for that, of course, is that I never attended seminary. But as an undergraduate Bible major and as a Ph.D. student in NT studies, I was never specifically trained in exegesis. An undergraduate course in hermeneutics was typical of many such courses—a lot of general, and often helpful, information, but not designed to teach the student how to exegete a piece of text in particular. On the other hand, I saw what was passing for exegesis in many seminaries and graduate schools—basically advanced Greek, in which “exegesis” meant to know the meaning of words and determine “what kind of genitive”—and instinct told me that, necessary and useful as such work was, it was *not* exegesis, but only one part of the whole.

So I did what many of my contemporaries had to do, who also were taught “exegesis” as a part of “hermeneutics” or as “advanced Greek”—I learned on my own. Of course I had many teachers: the better commentaries, such as that by Barrett on 1 Corinthians; my colleagues, especially David M. Scholer, now dean of Northern Baptist Seminary, with whom I team-taught the course in Interpreting the New Testament, and to whom I owe so much that has gone into this book. But much I learned simply by sitting with a piece of text and hammering out the questions on my own.

The impetus for writing the book came initially from my colleague Douglas Stuart, whose similar experience with OT exegesis led him to write the prior companion volume to this one (*Old Testament Exegesis*; Westminster Press, 1980). Soon after Professor Stuart’s book appeared, I wistfully voiced the desire to James Heaney of The Westminster Press that I would someday like to write the NT companion volume. Dr. Heaney exercised the proper pressure that finally resulted in “someday” becoming a deadline to be met with a manuscript.

Because this is a companion volume to Professor Stuart's book, I have had his always at my side, and I have purposefully tried to follow his outline as much as possible. Some students, who have already used *Old Testament Exegesis* with profit, at times will even find some verbatim repetition. I make no apologies for that; at many points the two disciplines intersect, and the two volumes are intended to be companions. But because OT and NT exegesis are in fact different disciplines, there are also some obvious differences in the format of the two books. The most notable differences are these: (a) I have included a second chapter in which several of the details of the outline given in Chapter I are elaborated. This second chapter is intended to teach students how to use certain key tools and how to wrestle with the basic *components of exegesis*. (b) Chapter IV (comparable to Professor Stuart's Chapter III) on aids and resources has been keyed to two bibliographies already extant. It did not seem necessary to duplicate this material when several such adequate helps are already available.

Students will soon learn that not everyone will do—or teach—exegesis in precisely the same way. This book attempts to take that into account. The steps given here are not hard-and-fast rules; they are guidelines. If another ordering of steps suits you better, or is followed by your own teachers, then by all means adapt to suit your own needs. What I have tried to provide is a guide to all the steps necessary to do good exegesis. To that end I trust it will be useful.

As with *Old Testament Exegesis*, this book assumes that exegesis requires a minimal knowledge of Greek. But it also is written to encourage the use of Greek by those whose knowledge of the language has grown rusty. Those students without knowledge of Greek will be able to use much of the guide, especially Chapter I. But as you will see in Chapter II, many of the crucial things require some working knowledge of the original language. Here we have offered translations of the Greek so that you might benefit as much as possible from this material. In fact, if you take the time to learn well the Greek alphabet, you will be able to use most of the tools discussed in that chapter. It is hoped that this book will encourage you eventually to acquire a knowledge of the language itself.

I would also like to reiterate here the need to have on hand two of the books Professor Stuart mentions in his Introduction:

Frederick W. Danker, *Multipurpose Tools for Bible Study*; 3d ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970);
Richard N. Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*; 2d ed. (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981).

These books will be excellent supplements to the present one, Danker's being a more thorough examination of the tools mentioned in Chapters II and IV, and Soulen's being a mine of definitions and explanations for nearly all the exegetical terms and techniques you will ever run across.

Finally, acknowledgment must be made of others besides Professors Scholer and Stuart who have contributed to this book. I am indebted to Professor Robert A. Guelich of Northern Baptist Seminary for some initial encouragement and especially for some helpful insights in using the Greek synopsis; to my colleague Dr. Rod Whitacre for generous interaction on the whole, and especially for material on the section on grammatical analysis; to my former student and sometime colleague Gerry Camery-Hoggatt for helpful suggestions at every stage, and especially for material on the documentation of secondary sources. My other two NT colleagues, Royce G. Gruenler and J. Ramsey Michaels, also joined in several hours of vigorous discussion of many parts. Special thanks for the expert typing skills of Holly Greening, Corinne Languedoc, and Anne Swetland.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

THE WARM WELCOME WITH WHICH the first edition of this book was received was both gratifying and the certain evidence that such a book was needed. Now—a decade later—a revised edition is called for, not because the basic elements or methods of exegesis have changed, but because much else has happened in ten years. Four matters in particular have called for this new edition.

First, I have spent the past six years teaching exegesis in the context of Regent College (Vancouver, B.C.), where the composition of our student body has forced me to rethink how this material can best be adapted for those who work with the English Bible only. Although many of our students are pursuing career church ministries, the majority are not, and our basic exegesis course is designed to cover both OT and NT, for both M.Div. and Diploma students, the majority of whom do not have Greek. I still require all students to learn the Greek alphabet (as suggested in the Preface to the First Edition), so that they may use the better tools, and I also require them to do assignments that force hands-on use of the various primary sources (in translation) noted in Step 8; but I also have made some adjustments for the sake of non-Greek students, both in the ordering of the steps and in bringing them more quickly to the secondary literature,

especially commentaries. These adjustments are now reflected in this revised edition.

Second, there has been a staggering amount of new secondary literature produced during the past decade. This new edition, therefore, allows me the opportunity to update the resources in Chapter IV. Not only so, but even the items mentioned in the first Preface need to be updated. Thus in addition to the volumes by Marshall and Harrington, the following very important books should be noted (and probably purchased):

David A. Black and David S. Dockery (eds.), *New Testament Criticism and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991).

Hans Conzelmann and Andreas Lindemann, *Interpreting the New Testament: An Introduction to the Principles and Methods of N.T. Exegesis*; trans. by S. S. Schatzmann of *Arbeitsbuch zum Neuen Testament*, 8th Ger. ed. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988).

The latter book, despite its English subtitle, not only deals with “principles and methods” but also offers major sections on backgrounds, content overviews, and the issues regarding the interpretation of Jesus and early Christianity.

At a much more practical level, and therefore especially for the sake of the English Bible users of this book, useful discussions of many of the matters addressed in the present book can be found in:

F. Furman Kearley, Edward P. Myers, and Timothy D. Hadley (eds.), *Biblical Interpretation, Principles and Practice: Studies in Honor of Jack Pearl Lewis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986).

Third, during the past decade computer-aided research materials have burgeoned. It is hard to know how much of this material properly fits into a “student handbook,” but at least some of the more readily available, or otherwise especially useful, items are noted in Chapter IV.

Fourth, when this book first appeared, rhetorical criticism was just beginning to make its presence felt in exegetical materials. Even

though the degree to which NT authors make use of these Hellenistic forms has probably been overstated by its practitioners, this area of study opens up new ways of hearing the NT letters and thus potentially offers many helpful insights into their interpretation. Thus, some discussion of rhetorical matters needed to be added (see I.9.3[E]), as well as some additional bibliography for further study.

As with the first edition, I am indebted to several people for their help in making this new edition possible. Here I record my thanks especially to my teaching assistant for 1991–92, James M. Leonard, whose help with students went far beyond all normal TA expectations, and who also reread the first edition with an especially critical eye toward its usefulness to students. I am also grateful to Dr. James M. Scott of Trinity Western University, who graciously made available to me his especially thorough, unpublished bibliography on “Lexical Resources for Greek, Latin and Christian Literatures,” and who also supplied the necessary bibliography for computer-aided research tools.

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