

Exegesis Skills Handout (Lectures 3.1–3.3)

Lecture 3.1 — Observation & Structure (and a Little Lexical)

Big Idea: Careful readers see more. The right details unlock the meaning of the text.

20 Types of Observations

- 1 Repetition – key words/phrases hammered home (Ps. 136; John 15).
- 2 Contrasts – opposites highlight meaning (Rom. 6; Prov. 10).
- 3 Comparisons – look for 'like'/'as' (Ps. 1; Matt. 13).
- 4 Cause & Effect – 'so that,' 'therefore' (John 3:16; Rom. 12:1).
- 5 Connectors – tiny words with big meaning (Eph. 2:4).
- 6 Figures of Speech – metaphor, hyperbole, irony (Luke 13:32; Ps. 42).
- 7 Pronouns – singular/plural distinctions (1 Cor. 3:16).
- 8 Tone / Emotion – mood of text (Gal. 3:1; Ps. 23).
- 9 Progression / Movement – flow of thought (Ps. 22; Jonah 1).
- 10 Purpose Statements – 'so that' (John 20:31).
- 11 Cause of Surprise – unexpected details (Luke 15; Num. 22).
- 12 Lists / Catalogues – intentional groupings (Gal. 5; Matt. 5).
- 13 Questions – rhetorical or real (Rom. 8:31; Ps. 13).
- 14 Commands / Imperatives – what we are told to do (Matt. 28).
- 15 Tension / Conflict – problems being resolved (Acts 6; Job).
- 16 Key Verbs – carry weight (John 3:16; Eph. 2).
- 17 Time Markers – sequence indicators (Mark's 'immediately').
- 18 Geography / Setting – places matter theologically (wilderness, temple).
- 19 Irony – truth hidden in mockery (John 19).
- 20 Theme Words / Motifs – repeated across a book (light in John).

Structure: The Skeleton of Meaning

- 1 Paragraph Flow – main vs. supporting clauses (Eph. 1:3–14).
- 2 Narrative Arc – setting → conflict → climax → resolution → response (Dan. 3).
- 3 Poetic Parallelism – synonymous, antithetic, synthetic (Ps. 19; Ps. 37; Ps. 1).
- 4 Chiasm – inverted structure centers the meaning (Matt. 6:24).
- 5 Turning Points – pivotal connectors like 'but God' (Eph. 2:4).

Lexical Cautions (The Big 5 Fallacies)

- 1 Root Fallacy – assuming meaning is bound up in etymology (ekklesia).
- 2 Semantic Anachronism – reading later meaning back in (dynamite/dynamis).
- 3 Semantic Obsolescence – using outdated sense (KJV 'prevent').
- 4 Illegitimate Totality Transfer – importing entire semantic range (logos).
- 5 Unwarranted Restriction – forcing one meaning everywhere (kosmos).

Lecture 3.2 — Context & Historical Background

Big Idea: A text without context becomes a pretext.

Contextual Study

- 1 Immediate Context – read before/after (Phil. 4:13 = contentment).
- 2 Book Context – how it fits author's purpose (Sermon on the Mount = new Moses).
- 3 Canonical Context – OT promises → NT fulfillment (Passover → Christ).
- 4 Checks: Would my interpretation still make sense in full chapter? Connections backward/forward?

Historical–Cultural Background

- 1 Why it matters: real times/places/cultures clarify meaning.
- 2 Tips: start with text, use credible sources, confirm with multiple voices, avoid speculation.
- 3 Examples: Samaritan hostility (Luke 10); Roman citizenship (Acts 25); Cana jars (John 2).
- 4 Cautions: Don't elevate background over text; test if interpretation stands without it.

Lecture 3.3 — Theological Reflection & Application

Big Idea: Every text teaches theology and demands transformation.

Theological Reflection

- 1 Definition: Moving from close reading → doctrinal truth.
- 2 Biblical Theology: text in redemptive storyline.
- 3 Systematic Theology: text in doctrinal categories.
- 4 Doctrinal Lenses: Theology Proper, Christology, Pneumatology, Anthropology, Hamartiology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, Eschatology.

Application

- 1 Definition: Moving from theological truth → transformation.
- 2 Framework: Head (belief), Heart (affections), Hands (actions), Habits (patterns).
- 3 Pitfalls: Jumping to application before theology = moralism; ignoring application = sterile intellectualism.