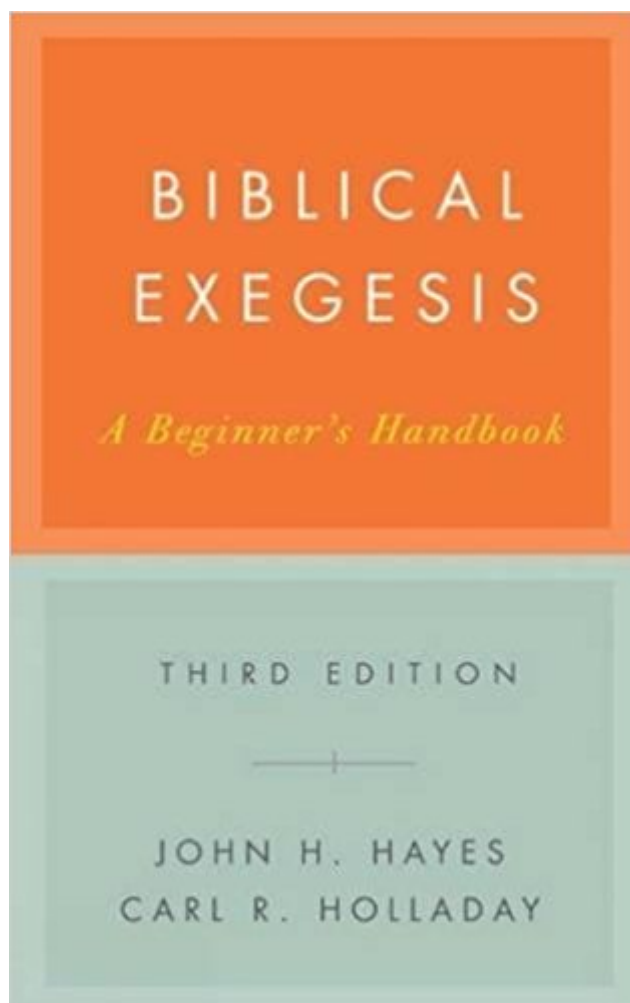


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# Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook



## Synopsis

John Hayes and Carl Holladay have thoroughly revised and expanded this best-selling textbook, adding new chapters on emerging methods of interpretation and the use of computer technology for exegesis. All bibliographies have been updated, and Scripture has been converted to the NRSV. This new edition retains the features of the early editions: a minimum of technical terms, solid introductory guidelines in exegetical methods, and a valuable presentation of exegetical theory and practice. It is ideal for general introductory exegesis courses, introductions to the Old and New Testaments, and introduction to preaching, as well as for pastors and lay leaders.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

John H. Hayes is Professor Emeritus of Old Testament at Candler School of Theology, Emory University, in Atlanta, Georgia. He is the author of numerous books, including *Introduction to the Bible*, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook* (with Carl Holladay), *The Jewish People in Classical Antiquity* (with Sara Mandell), and *Old Testament Theology: Its History and Development* (with Frederick Prussner), all published by WJK. Carl R. Holladay is Charles Howard Candler Professor of New Testament at Candler School of Theology, Emory University, in Atlanta, Georgia. He is coauthor of *Preaching the New Common Lectionary Years A-C* and *Preaching through the Christian Year, A-C*.

From its back cover, *Biblical Exegesis* introduces solid guidelines on exegetical methods and presents how these methods play out in practice. This book is not an in-depth analysis of exegetical methods, nor does it claim to do that. What *Biblical Exegesis* does accomplish is to equip readers with a basic set of investigatory tools so that they can embark on their own interpretive quest. The fruits of said investigation can be applied to personal study, Bible study groups, sermons, Christian education classes and Sunday school. *Biblical Exegesis* begins by introducing the field of exegesis, factors that have shaped it over time, as well as the features unique to interpreting the Bible. Each subsequent chapter tackles a specific model of exegetical criticism: textual, historical, grammatical, literary, form, tradition, redaction, structuralist, and canonical. Each of these chapters first introduce what the critical model aims to do, how it developed, and then explains how the Bible can be evaluated using the specific model. The chapters also have examples of how a model is applied and the authors exegete a portion of a Biblical text as an example. In my opinion, this is where *Biblical Exegesis* shines and takes what is theoretical to what is very practical. By studying the examples, the students are also given a blueprint on the types of questions each model compels the exegete to ask. The final chapters touch briefly on more modern exegetical strategies (e.g. womanist and liberation) and then proceed to describe how all of the models can be integrated for practical, everyday uses (e.g. preaching). Much of the information in this last section is common sense. I read this book as required by a graduate level seminary course and would especially recommend it for seminarians who would like to solidify their Bible study and for those who will be teaching theological education classes.

This is a great introduction to the discipline of BE. It has a lot of breadth to give a novice a good flavor of multiple facets of BE without going into too much depth and drowning one in technical terms and methodology. Very nice overview for beginners. In the first chapter, the authors introduce the field itself, provide basic definitions and historical perspectives/evolution of the field. In the following chapters they discuss each of the major techniques or approaches to biblical criticism. Once again, the book isn't trying to be an in-depth, all-encompassing resource, it provides a very high level, but good overview of the field and each individual discipline. Most chapters have thorough and well organized bibliographies for further study of individual topics, which is very useful. Here are the titles of the chapters:

- 1 Introducing exegesis
- 2 Textual criticism (the quest for the original wording)
- 3 Historical criticism (the setting in time and space)
- 4 Grammatical criticism (the language of the text)
- 5 Literary criticism (the composition and rhetorical style of the text)
- 6 Form criticism (the genre and life setting of the text)
- 7 Tradition criticism (the stages behind the text)
- 8

Redaction criticism (the final viewpoint and theology)<sup>9</sup> Structuralist criticism (the universals in the text)<sup>10</sup> Canonical criticism (the sacred text of Synagogue and Church)<sup>11</sup> Integrating exegetical procedures<sup>12</sup> Employing the fruits of Biblical Exegesis

One of the many flavors of introductory biblical criticism books available. What I enjoyed about this book--and one of its particular aims--was its fresh, non-technical presentation of thoughts and ideas under consideration, casting new light on familiar concepts and grounding them in the everyday world, and how it made plain the many questions we oftentimes intuitively ask about the text, but aren't fully aware of doing. This book takes the common sense from which the sophistication of biblical criticism has been built and exposes it, which is truly delightful. When I read that it was going to have a two-testament approach, I was skeptical. Other such books that have attempted a more holistic, inclusive outlook (such as *To Each Its Own Meaning* by McKenzie and Haynes), have tended to draw from their pool of examples unevenly. It is certainly instructive, for instance, for a person in New Testament studies to see a certain methodology or concept applied to a Hebraic text (or vice versa), but to see this play out in one's specific field of study--especially when dealing with an introductory book--is a necessity. Although many of the examples given in this book are widely used, appearing in other forms of this literature, I was pleasantly surprised by the very balanced treatment of both testaments throughout. This increases its value to students of both fields. The only place where I felt more could have been provided was in the discussion of textual families, which focused almost exclusively on New Testament texts without revealing the hidden secret (at least to new exegetes) that the so-called Masoretic Text is really a family or type of text and not a single manuscript. One book belonging to this type of literature is *Reading the Old Testament* by John Barton. I love that book. And this is certainly no match for Barton. But one thing Barton lacked was any historical treatment of the texts. This book includes a very welcome chapter on historical criticism including a brief introduction to Reception History. The latter proved worthwhile because it revealed to me a conundrum I experienced when talking about biblical interpretation with certain varieties of religious folk. I would say something about doing historical work with the text, and they would respond favorably, but interpret me to be speaking about interpretations of the text throughout history within the church (like what Augustine or Luther might have thought the text meant). Thanks to this book, I now understand them to be speaking of Reception History, a valuable tool of interpretation to be sure, but something entirely different. Another welcome insight provided by this book occurred in the chapter on Grammatical Criticism, where it laid out various common pitfalls encountered by those attempting to gain an informed reading of the text through its grammar and

syntax. I have a feeling that some of this is discussed in a book I've been meaning to read by James Barr called *The Semantics of Biblical Language*. This was incredibly revealing and even corrected a few mistakes that I, myself, have made in the past. There are, however, a number of problems. Its treatment of what it calls "special focus" exegesis (like cultural, gender, sexual, economic, and other such perspectives) is appallingly brief. It lumps together the past thirty or forty years, which saw an explosion of new critical perspectives that radically changed the field of biblical studies, into one chapter. And that is the single shortest chapter in the book. What it does in that chapter, it does well, such as introducing us to Liberation Theology (and giving me my first glimpse at Queer Theory), but one would expect at least as much time and attention to this whole new arena as was given to the other in chapters 2-10. This is where a book like *To Each Its Own Meaning* outshines it, with individual chapters dedicated to things like Social-Scientific Criticism, Rhetorical Criticism and Intertextuality, Narrative Criticism, Reader-Response Criticism, and Feminist Criticism. This is a serious fault of the book. It is floating above a two-star rating only on the strength of its other parts. And, finally, I have mixed feelings about the Appendix--a section on computers and internet. The authors acknowledge how out-of-date it will likely be by the time it is published and that is certainly true at the time of my reading. But I'm really not sure how helpful it is. Whatever generation is reading this book nowadays is pretty computer and internet savvy. If the Appendix tells them anything that would be useful to their studies, it is quite likely that they already know about it or have experience with it. Additionally, if they were going to go the route of exposing their readers in a general sense to different computer software useful in biblical studies, it would have been beneficial to include references to less known, but just as helpful and powerful alternatives that exist outside the proprietary world (like BibleTime, Xiphos, Alkitab, and PocketSword).

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