

Exegesis is not a checklist of questions—entire books are available to address any one of the following questions. Exegesis is a process of interacting with the text in a disciplined manner. The following questions are intended to keep you headed in the right direction, not to stifle your own questions. The questions themselves are only helpful as they illuminate the text. Keep in mind the central question: how does this help me understand the text more deeply?

## 1. FORM CRITICISM

a. Define the unit: Where does the unit begin and end, and how do you know? Watch for changes in geography, characters, genre, chronology, and also transitional sentences and paragraphs.

b. Structure: What are the formal elements in the text? Lay them out in outline form. What can you determine from their sequence: do they build to a climax, follow a sequence of logic, form a pattern? What is the relationship of the parts? How does the structure inform our understanding of the text's meaning?

c. Genre: To what group of texts does this text belong (e.g. legend, historical story, tale, battle report, theophany)? How is this genre defined, and how does this text make use of the traditional elements of this genre?

d. Setting in life: In what social group does this text originate (family, royal court, prophetic groups, army, local shrine), and what are the signals of this in the text? If a legend about David's heroism, for example, originates in the royal court of Jerusalem, how would that affect the interpretation?

e. Intention: Why was this text important to Israel or a group within Israel—why did they continue to recount it? Does it seek to rehearse the exploits of the past, teach a particular set of values, challenge the community's ethos? Does it intend to instruct, inspire, remonstrate, honor a hero's reputation, reinforce state ideology?

## 2. LITERARY CRITICISM [OF NARRATIVE]

a. Plot: What is the narrative conflict, and how is it resolved? Who is/are the agent/s of the resolution? How does the story unfold?

b. Characters: Who are the characters? How are they described? What does their speech (or lack of it) reveal about them? How do they relate to each other? Who speaks first and last? Are the characters involved in challenge and riposte?

c. Structuring and Focusing Devices: What devices are employed to communicate important points? Key-word repetition (Leitwort): a word in a variety of grammatical forms may be used to highlight

Dr. K. C. Hanson

a point of theology, character, plot sequence (e.g. "laugh" in Genesis 18 + 21). Motif: an image, action, or object recurs as a symbol of a larger issue or to provide formal coherence to the story (e.g. clothing in Genesis 37-50). Theme: an idea which manifests the values of the story in terms of morality, politics, theology, law, or tradition (e.g. in Genesis 25:19-34 the themes of barrenness, sibling rivalry, and parental preferences). Sequence of actions: patterns of actions which demonstrate parallels between characters. This is especially obvious in the "folkloric triad": a sequence of three requests, disasters, messages, etc.

### 3. HISTORY

a. Dating: Does the text provide any clues with regard to the dating of the events: names of Israelite, Judean, or foreign kings? International political events, such as wars, migrations, collapse of empires? Identifiable locations? Meteorological or seismic accounts?

b. Correlation: Can these events, persons, and locations be correlated with or verified from external evidence: comparative records from other empires, literary texts, inscriptions, archaeological sites?

c. Evaluation: After gathering the potential raw materials, they must be evaluated as to their ideological perspectives, plausibility, and relevance for explaining the text.

### 4. ARCHAEOLOGY

a. Period: What major archaeological periods is/are relevant to this text: Late Bronze Age, Early Iron Age, Persian Period? How does this affect the story?

b. Material culture: What sorts of implements does the text mention or assume which illuminate the dynamics of the story: pottery, tools, weapons, etc.? What type of housing, other buildings, walls, means of storage were being employed during this period?

c. Geography: What is the geographical setting of the narrative: plains, rivers, hills, valleys, wadis? How do the cultivation, marine access, etc., affect the culture in the region?

### 5. CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

a. Institutions: What social domains and institutions are involved in the text: kinship (marriage, child-rearing, inheritance), politics (monarchy, chiefdom, army, international treaties), political religion (temple-cult, priesthood, prophecy),

political economy (imports/exports, trade contracts, shipping, mining), kin-based economy (farming, pottery, merchants)? What is the shape of the institutions involved, and how does that inform our understanding of the text, the people, and the period?

b. **Values:** What values are exhibited in the text? How do they fit into the larger framework of values in the culture: does the text confirm or challenge the traditional values, and how? Watch especially for: honor/shame, hospitality, land as life, purity, centrality of the kin-group, upholding tradition.

c. **Social Conflict:** Does the text deal explicitly or implicitly with conflict between individuals or groups? What is the conflict over: honor, political power, resources (wealth, land, water)? What means are used to resolve the conflict: physical force, negotiation, mediation, political influence? Does the text exhibit a social hierarchy, and is that hierarchy reinforced or challenged?

d. **Miscellaneous:** How do various social factors affect the characters in the story: peasant society, agrarian economy, strong-group socialization, purity codes, social stratification, past orientation, West Semitic language?

## 6. Theology

a. **God:** How is Yahweh/God described in the text? How does Yahweh act, speak, respond? What sort of emotions are attributed to Yahweh? How does Yahweh interact with the community or individuals: face to face, in a dream, by casting lots, or only implicitly?

b. **Epithets:** What epithets (stereotyped formulas), if any, are used of Yahweh in the text (e.g. God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; El Shaddai; Yahweh of the Armies)? What do they signify? To what traditions are they connected?

b. **Intermediaries:** Does the text mention intermediaries between Yahweh and the community: angel, prophet, king, patriarch? How do they function as facilitators?

c. **Conceptualities:** What underlying concepts and ideological perspectives inform the text: divine judgment, monism, Yahweh as creator, redemption, act—consequence, etc.?

d. **Interaction:** How does the theology of this text fit into the larger fabric of Israel's theological dialogue. For example, one might compare the intimacy with which Yahweh interacts with humans in the Yahwist to the necessity of formal intermediaries in the Priestly source.

