

Exegesis and Eisegesis are two conflicting approaches in Bible study. This is something that is studied in all Southern Baptist Seminaries, by those preparing for the ministry.

Exegesis: Pronounced as: eksi'jēsis

Eisegesis: Pronounced as: ī-sə-'jē-səs,

Exegesis is the exposition or explanation of a text based on a careful, objective analysis. The word exegesis literally means “to lead out of.” That means that the interpreter is led to his conclusions by following the text.

The opposite approach to Scripture is eisegesis, which is the interpretation of a passage based on a subjective, non-analytical reading. The word eisegesis literally means “to lead into,” which means the interpreter injects his own ideas into the text, making it mean whatever he wants.

Obviously, only exegesis does justice to the text. Eisegesis is a mishandling of the text and often leads to a misinterpretation. Exegesis is concerned with discovering the true meaning of the text, respecting its grammar, syntax, and setting. Eisegesis is concerned only with making a point, even at the expense of the meaning of words.

[Second Timothy 2:15](#) commands us to use exegetical methods: “Present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.” An honest student of the Bible will be an exegete, allowing the text to speak for itself. Eisegesis easily lends itself to error, as the would-be interpreter attempts to align the text with his own preconceived notions. Exegesis allows us to agree with the Bible; eisegesis seeks to force the Bible to agree with us.

The process of exegesis involves 1) observation: what does the passage say? 2) interpretation: what does the passage mean? 3) correlation: how does the passage relate to the rest of the Bible? and 4) application: how should this

passage affect my life?

Eisegesis, on the other hand, involves 1) imagination: what idea do I want to present? 2) exploration: what Scripture passage seems to fit with my idea? and 3) application: what does my idea mean? Notice that, in eisegesis, there is no examination of the words of the text or their relationship to each other, no cross-referencing with related passages, and no real desire to understand the actual meaning. Scripture serves only as a prop to the interpreter's idea.

To illustrate, let's use both approaches in the treatment of one passage:

2 Chronicles 27:1-2

“Jotham was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. . . . He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father Uzziah had done, but unlike him he did not enter the temple of the LORD.”

EISEGESIS

First, the interpreter decides on a topic. Today, it's “The Importance of Church Attendance.” The interpreter reads [2 Chronicles 27:1-2](#) and sees that King Jotham was a good king, just like his father Uzziah had been, except for one thing: he didn't go to the temple! This passage seems to fit his idea, so he uses it. The resulting sermon deals with the need for passing on godly values from one generation to the next. Just because King Uzziah went to the temple every week didn't mean that his son would continue the practice. In the same way, many young people today tragically turn from their parents' training, and church attendance drops off. The sermon ends with a question: “How many blessings did Jotham fail to receive, simply because he neglected church?”

Certainly, there is nothing wrong with preaching about church attendance or the transmission of values. And a cursory reading of [2 Chronicles 27:1-2](#) seems to support that passage as an apt illustration. However, the above interpretation is totally wrong. For Jotham not to go to the temple was not wrong; in fact, it was very good, as the proper approach to the passage will show.

EXEGESIS

First, the interpreter reads the passage and, to fully understand the context, he reads the histories of both Uzziah and Jotham ([2 Chronicles 26-27](#); [2](#)

[Kings 15:1-6, 32-38](#)). In his observation, he discovers that King Uzziah was a good king who nevertheless disobeyed the Lord when he went to the temple and offered incense on the altar—something only a priest had the right to do ([2 Chronicles 26:16-20](#)). Uzziah’s pride and his contamination of the temple resulted in his having “leprosy until the day he died” ([2 Chronicles 26:21](#)).

Needing to know why Uzziah spent the rest of his life in isolation, the interpreter studies [Leviticus 13:46](#) and does some research on leprosy. Then he compares the use of illness as a punishment in other passages, such as [2 Kings 5:27](#); [2 Chronicles 16:12](#); and [21:12-15](#).

By this time, the exegete understands something important: when the passage says Jotham “did not enter the temple of the LORD,” it means he did not repeat his father’s mistake. Uzziah had proudly usurped the priest’s office; Jotham was more obedient.

The resulting sermon might deal with the Lord’s discipline of His children, with the blessing of total obedience, or with our need to learn from the mistakes of the past rather than repeat them.

Of course, exegesis takes more time than eisegesis. But if we are to be those unashamed workmen “who correctly handle the word of truth,” then we must take the time to truly understand the text. Exegesis is the only way.

(Source: S. Michael Houdmann, GotQuestions.org, used with permission)