

SAMPLE BASED ON AUGUST 2008 AND 2009

## **EXAMINATION IN OPEN BOOK BIBLE EXEGESIS**

### **GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS**

This examination shall assess the candidate's ability to interpret an assigned passage of Scripture by demonstrating attention to the original language of the text, an understanding of the text's historical context, and an ability to relate the text effectively to the contemporary life of the church in the world.

The candidate shall have access to Hebrew and Greek texts, translations, commentaries, and other exegetical tools. Using these, he or she shall provide a faithful interpretation of the passage, show how he or she arrived at this interpretation, and suggest how this passage might be used in the contemporary life of the church. (This description approved by 2008 General Assembly.)

### **ASSIGNMENT OF PASSAGE**

Choose from selected passages:

**Zechariah 9:9-13 OR 2 Peter 3:8-15a**

Your examination is due to your proctor at **9:00 AM, SEPTEMBER 2, 2010**. The time of submission will be strictly observed.

### **SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONS**

1. You must do your own work, without giving or receiving aid from anyone after the passages are announced. The exam will not be proctored.
2. Clearly identify each section of the exam. Within Section I label your answers "First Required Response," etc., and indicate "A" or "B" where appropriate. Identify the parts of Section II by number.
3. In formulating your answers, remember that your readers will be looking for an ability to work with the passage in its original language and to communicate the findings of biblical scholarship to those who have not had the opportunity of formal training in the field.
4. You must provide original answers to the exam questions. When using written material from other sources, you must identify the author, title, and page number. You must also identify electronic sources, either software or on-line. You may use parenthetical citations within the text of your answers, endnotes, or footnotes.
5. Include a bibliography of consulted works.
6. Readers will be looking for logical organization and consistency within the examination. They will evaluate the exam as a unit and not in parts.

## EXAMINATION IN OPEN BOOK BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

Page 2 of 7

### REQUIRED PARTS OF A SATISFACTORY EXAMINATION

The following sections are required parts of a “Satisfactory” examination. Failure to complete any of these sections will result in the failure of the examination as a whole. The specified ministry contexts for each passage and specific questions in each of the categories of Section I will be provided when the passages are announced.

#### **Section I: Language, Historical Situation, Scriptural and Theological Context**

After studying the passage, answer the questions in the following subject areas.

1. *Language of the Text:* word meanings, grammar, literary and other features with respect to both its original language and its translation into the language of the modern community.
2. *Historical Situation:* the influence of the historical and cultural context in which the engagement between God and God’s people has come.
3. *Scriptural and Theological Context:* the passage’s relation to the broad teaching of Scripture and theological tradition of the church.

A total of **four** responses will be required in Section I of the examination, and there will be a *600-word limit per response*. You will be required to respond to three specified questions and will be permitted to select between an option of either A or B in the other response. To assist the readers of your examination, clearly label this portion as Section I and identify each response by required response number and letter (as necessary).

#### **Section II: Presenting a Faithful Interpretation**

1. *Focus Statement:* Write a focus statement based on your broad study of the passage (not just material presented in Section I) that articulates a central theme of your faithful interpretation of the passage. *Limit your statement to 50 words.*
2. *Supporting the Interpretation:* Write an essay presenting your faithful interpretation of the passage consistent with the central theme in the focus statement. Support your interpretation by a careful and critical analysis of the text. You may draw on any material in areas of the required responses in Section I and other exegetical methods and evidence relevant to the interpretation. *Limit your essay to 1,200 words.*

#### **Section III: Application**

Present a sermon outline or lesson plan (as required by the specified ministry context) based on your faithful interpretation of the passage and consistent with your focus statement. *Limit your sermon outline or lesson plan to 2 pages.*

**EXAMINATION IN OPEN BOOK BIBLE EXEGESIS**

**Page 3 of 7**

**FINAL INSTRUCTIONS**

You may write your answers in ink in your own handwriting, type them, or use a computer. Do not use a pencil to write your responses; **papers written in pencil will be returned without being evaluated.** If you handwrite your examination, do not skip lines in the examination book. You may make corrections, deletions, or additions without rewriting or erasing. Identify every answer by the number and letter assigned to it (e.g., III. B). **Illegible papers shall be returned without being evaluated.**

You are encouraged to use a computer. You may bring your own equipment or, at some exam sites, you may use equipment provided by the proctor. You must confirm with the proctor in advance of the testing date what equipment (power strips, computers, printers, etc.) is available at the testing site.

If you use a computer:

- A printed copy of the exam must be turned in before you leave the test site. Not turning in a printed copy will result in failure. You are strongly urged to make sure that all the necessary equipment and software are properly working and coordinated.
- Number the pages.
- Include your candidate number on each page of the exam, **but not your name.**
- Print responses using double spacing and 12-point font size.
- When finished, staple the printed copy to the first few pages of the exam book.

Syntax or grammar will not be evaluated. However, the evaluation of papers may be affected if they cannot be understood because of poor syntax or grammar.

**Maintaining the candidate's anonymity is of fundamental importance to assure fair evaluation of examination papers. Failure to comply with any of the following instructions will result in the paper being found as unsatisfactory:**

- **Do not include your name**
- **Do not include the name of your congregation or presbytery**
- **Do not identify the seminary you attend or have attended**
- **Do not identify professors with whom you have studied**
- **Do not indicate whether you have taken this or other senior ordination exams before**

**OPEN BOOK EXAMINATION IN BIBLE EXEGESIS**  
**SAMPLE BASED ON PASSAGES FOR AUGUST 2008 AND 2009**

Page 4 of 7

**Zechariah 9:9-13**

**OR**

**2 Peter 3:8-15a**

**Zechariah 9:9-13**

**Ministry Context:**

You are teaching a series of Bible studies entitled, “The Prophets on Their Own Terms.” Each class explores a well-known prophecy from the Old Testament explicitly related to Jesus in the New Testament. The goal is to help class participants to see the prophets as more than just the popularly-conceived clairvoyants predicting distant future events. You are preparing the lesson on Zechariah 9:9-13. This ministry context should inform your responses throughout the examination. In the final section of this examination, you will present your lesson plan for this Bible study.

**Section I: Language, Historical Situation, Scriptural and Theological Context**

After studying Zechariah 9:9-13, answer the questions in the following required areas of response. To assist the readers of your examination, clearly label this portion as Section I and identify each response by number and letter as necessary. *Limit your answer for each response to 600 words.*

**1. *Language of the Text***

**First Required Response:** In comparing translations of Zechariah 9:9 as part of your study, you come across the following two translations, one of which seems to speak of a political context and the other to a spiritual one:

— “triumphant and victorious is he” (*New Revised Standard Version*)

— “just and having salvation is he” (*King James Version*)

Explain the basis for the different renderings of צַדִּיק וְנוֹשֵׁעַ הוּא and why you have chosen your particular translation for use in your application of the text.

**2. *Historical Context***

**Second Required Response:** As you left the previous session, one of the members of the class asked why you even bother with the “minor prophets.” After all, “Why should we care what they say when no one can even keep straight what order they are found in the Bible?” Discuss the identity and historical context of the prophet responsible for the “oracle” (נְאֻם) of which Zechariah 9:9-13 is a part. What are the implications of this historical context for understanding the prophet’s conception of the identity and scope of the reign of the coming king in 9:10?

**3. *Scriptural and Theological Context***

**Third Required Response:** “Covenant” is a key concept within both Scripture and Reformed theology, and for that very reason it is one about which your congregation often has questions. What is the effect of the covenant on God’s actions here in Zechariah 9:9-13? Support your answer from the specific language in verse 11. How does this inform your understanding of the passage?

**Fourth Required Response:** Choose *either* “A” or “B.”

While you are sure that at least some in your Bible study class will be unfamiliar with the Book of Zechariah, you are also quite sure that some of its language will spark associations in their minds with other passages in Scripture. Thinking about the relationship between Zechariah 9:9-13 and its canonical context, respond to *either* “A” or “B.”

- A. In almost every phrase of verses 9-13 it is possible to discern echoes of other prophetic passages, the psalms, or the sacred narrative traditions of ancient Israel. What are the theological implications for understanding the nature of prophecy given the connections between the language of verses 9-13 and the language of these earlier traditions? What might this understanding of prophecy’s relation with other earlier traditions suggest for later readers who encounter Zechariah’s oracles as canonical scripture?

OR

- B. Discuss the appropriation of Zechariah 9:9 in Matthew 21:1-11. How does this evangelist see Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem as a “fulfillment” of this portion of the prophetic “oracle” in Zechariah 9–11? Could this be a case of an historical event interpreted in light of a prophetic tradition or a story created out of a prophetic text? What difference would that make to the modern church’s understanding of Zechariah?

**Section II: Presenting a Faithful Interpretation**

1. **Focus Statement:** Write a focus statement based on your broad study of the passage (not just material presented in Section I) that articulates a central theme of your faithful interpretation of the passage. *Limit your statement to 50 words.*
2. **Supporting the Interpretation:** Write an essay presenting your faithful interpretation of the passage consistent with the central theme in the focus statement. Support your interpretation by a careful and critical analysis of the text. You may draw on any material in areas of the required responses in Section I and other exegetical methods and evidence relevant to the interpretation. *Limit your essay to 1,200 words.*

**Section III: Application**

Based on your faithful interpretation of the passage and keeping with your focus statement, present the lesson plan for the passage as required by the ministry context specified for this passage. *Limit your lesson plan to 2 pages.*

**OPEN BOOK EXAMINATION IN BIBLE EXEGESIS**

**Page 6 of 7**

**2 Peter 3:8-15a**

**Ministry Context:**

In preparing your sermons for Advent, you are thinking about how to help your congregation recover the traditional emphasis of this season in the liturgical year as a time when we look back to Jesus' first advent, or "coming," in anticipation of his future return. You notice that the epistle lesson for the Second Sunday of Advent (Year B) is 2 Peter 3:8-15a. You choose to preach on that text to highlight the importance of Jesus' second advent within the season. This ministry context should inform your responses throughout the examination. In the final section of this examination, you will present your outline for this sermon.

**Section I: Language, Historical Situation, Scriptural and Theological Context**

After studying 2 Peter 3:8-15a, answer the questions in the following required areas of response. To assist the readers of your examination, clearly label this portion as Section I and identify each response by number and letter as necessary. *Limit your answer for each response to 600 words.*

**1. *Language of the Text***

**First Required Response:** In comparing translations of 2 Peter 3:10 you come across two very different translations of one portion of the verse:

“everything that is done on it will be disclosed” (New Revised Standard Version)

“its works will be burned up” (New American Standard Bible)

Based on your study of the Greek text of this verse in one of the modern, critical editions, explain the basis for these different translations of the verse. Why do you prefer one of these translations over the other, or why would you choose some other translation? What difference does the translation of this portion of the verse make to your understanding of the passage?

**Second Required Response:** Discuss the simile in verse 10 that describes the coming of the “day of the Lord” as being “like a thief.” What are some points of comparison between that “day” and a “thief,” and what are some aspects of contrast? Who specifically is the “Lord” whose “day” is coming according to this verse, and on what do you base your identification?

**2. *Historical Situation:***

**Third Required Response:** By the end of the first century, the ‘delay of the Parousia’ had become a critical issue in many Christian communities. The author suggests in verse 9 that “some” think “the Lord is ... slow” in fulfilling promises. Within the context of 2 Peter 3, to whom is the author referring by the use of “some”? What reasons are suggested within this passage for why Jesus had not yet returned to bring the current age to a close?

**3. Scriptural and Theological Context**

**Fourth Required Response: Choose either “A” or “B.”**

- A. At several points in this passage there are references to the destruction of the current created order and the coming of “new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home” (see verse 13). Discuss the implications of this passage’s anticipation of a coming “new earth” for considering Christians’ responsibilities as stewards of the current earth?

**OR**

- B. Discuss the tension in this passage between divine wrath and judgment implicit in the fiery destruction of this world, on the one hand, and divine grace and redemption expressed in God’s patience in providing opportunity for salvation, on the other. How does this passage contribute to your understanding of the relationship between God’s justice and mercy?

**Section II: Presenting a Faithful Interpretation**

1. **Focus Statement:** Write a focus statement based on your broad study of the passage (not just material presented in Section I) that articulates a central theme of your faithful interpretation of the passage. *Limit your statement to 50 words.*
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**Section III: Application**

Based on your faithful interpretation of the passage and keeping with your focus statement, present the sermon outline for preaching on the passage as required by the specified ministry context. *Limit your sermon outline to 2 pages.*