PhD in Bible Exposition Dissertation Guide

I. INTRODUCTION

The production of an acceptable PhD level dissertation represents the culmination of the research-based PhD in Bible Exposition degree. A PhD dissertation is an extended discourse on a research topic in the student's field of study that makes a unique contribution on a matter of scholarly significance. Consequently, you are encouraged to be thinking about a topic early in the program so that refinement can begin during stage one and stage two coursework, even if actual writing commences to begin in stage three of the PhD in Bible Exposition program. The final dissertation product should demonstrate critical thinking skills, comprehensive knowledge of pertinent subject matter, thorough research, and precision in writing style and presentation. Ultimately, the PhD in Bible Exposition dissertation must pass a defense of the thesis statement and the supporting arguments presented in the final dissertation draft.

The dissertation should consist of 50,000 to 80,000 words of content, exclusive of front matter and bibliography. In order to make a worthy contribution to the field of knowledge, you should choose a dissertation subject which will add to and is based in the current discussion of scholarship in the field of biblical studies and/or related areas of study. This means that you will need to search exhaustively for what others have written on your topic. You should not seek merely to repeat or survey what others have said about the topic; you must make an original contribution to the subject. The PhD in Bible Exposition dissertation must embody a well-researched position demonstrating critical judgment, independence of thought, and exegetical soundness.

Dissertation topics for the PhD in Bible Exposition vary according to the interests of the student, but any topic (or prospectus) approved will necessarily fall within the broad spectrum of topics and issues pertaining to biblical interpretation, biblical theology, biblical backgrounds, or exegetical analysis. Topics that relate to systematic theology, practical theology, church history, missiology, or apologetics will be considered, but must contain a significant emphasis in the biblical text (better than 50% of the dissertation should directly involve text based research in Scripture). Dissertations in the PhD in Bible Exposition program involve text based research pertaining to the historical, literary, and theological aspects of Scripture. Dissertations will not involve a primary emphasis in statistical research pertaining to the social sciences and/or that related to ministry practice.

A PhD in Bible Exposition dissertation topic will only be approved upon the completion of a dissertation prospectus. This takes place within the BIBL 987 course, and approval of the prospectus is granted by the faculty member overseeing the BIBL 987 course (often, but not necessarily, the director of the PhD in Bible Exposition program). Students will receive direct guidance in the BIBL 987 course as they develop initial ideas into a formal and detailed prospectus, but ultimately, it is the prospectus that must be approved before dissertation writing can proceed. The prospectus will necessarily establish a thesis statement that can be supported by thoroughly researching and supporting the various elements of interest pertaining to that

dissertation topic and associated thesis statement.

Essential guidelines for dissertation form are found in *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (current edition) by Kate L. Turabian. Details relevant to the field of Bible Exposition (biblical and theological studies, etc…) will additionally defer to the current edition of the *SBL Handbook of Style*. Accuracy in form, correct grammar, appropriate organization, and a clear and concise English style will be crucial to a successful dissertation. Students are expected to know and follow the latest policy on academic honesty as stated by Liberty University.

A dissertation is an academic document demonstrating a high level of proficiency in research writing and analytical skills within the appropriate field of study. It may be necessary for the dissertation writer to draw conclusions with which the faculty is not in full agreement. For this reason, it is understood that the views expressed in student dissertations are not necessarily those of the University, the faculty, or the specific mentor and/or reader who may approve the dissertation. You should recognize, on the other hand, that you are writing the dissertation at Liberty University and for a mentor and reader who agree with the doctrinal statement of the institution.

II. STEPS IN THE PRODUCTION OF THE PHD IN BIBLE EXPOSITION DISSERTATION

The PhD in Bible Exposition program is divided into three stages in which course work is completed sequentially. Stage one is comprised of Greek and Hebrew language courses (of which many students will transfer required courses into the program from prior graduate level work), along with two foundational courses specific to the PhD in Bible Exposition (BIBL 700 and BIBL 715). Stage two is comprised of nine "800 level" courses that expose students to scholarly issues pertaining to the study of Scripture in its various segments and elements. In BIBL 700 students are encouraged to begin considering potential dissertation topics that would align well with the PhD in Bible Exposition program curriculum. Also, students begin the process of refining their skills in writing solid PhD level research papers (this carries on throughout stage one and stage two coursework). But the dissertation is not written in stage one or stage two courses. Presumably, a student might write a paper in a course that later is refined and/or adapted into the dissertation product, but the stage one and stage two curriculum is not designed around dissertation development.

After completing all required coursework in stages one and two of the degree program, students will be permitted to enroll in BIBL 987 (Research and Communication for Bible Exposition). BIBL 987 begins stage three of the program, at which point the dissertation is written sequentially through three research courses (BIBL 987, BIBL 988, and BIBL 989), and finalized through a defense (BIBL 900). BIBL 987 involves the development and approval of a PhD prospectus that provides a detailed "roadmap" for the dissertation. Writing can begin in BIBL 987, but becomes the sole focus in BIBL 988 (Research Methodology for Bible Exposition). It is during BIBL 988 that the student will begin composing the initial chapters of the dissertation under the supervision of the student's mentor. The dissertation continues to take shape in BIBL

989 (Dissertation Research and Writing), and by the completion of BIBL 989, a final draft of the dissertation must be approved by the dissertation mentor prior to enrollment in BIBL 990. The BIBL 990 (Dissertation Defense) course finalizes stage three, and upon completion, the PhD in Bible Exposition degree is conferred.

Below are the typical stage three steps for the PhD in Bible Exposition program. These steps are "housed" in the courses outlined above, and are further described in the relevant course syllabi.

Step 1. Upon successful completion of stage two coursework, students may enroll in BIBL 987, which effectively begins stage three of the PhD in Bible Exposition program. As a part of BIBL 987, a prospectus is written under the supervision of the PhD BE program director or an approved faculty member overseeing the course. The prospectus is essentially a proposal for dissertation writing and research. It includes a thesis statement, detailed bibliography, chapter by chapter synopsis, and general framework for the intended process and goals in research and writing. It is a detailed proposal that outlines where a dissertation is going and the intended route to get there. Typically, it will propose 5 to 9 chapters that come together to support a dissertation thesis statement or objective. The prospectus should be at least 4000 words, and is not intended to serve as a part of the dissertation (in other words, it is separate from the dissertation, and does not function as an introductory chapter).

Step 2. As a part of the BIBL 987 course, and upon completion and approval of the prospectus, the faculty member overseeing BIBL 987 will assist the student to identify a dissertation mentor who has expertise in the subject area pertaining to the prospectus. Once the student is paired with a dissertation mentor, the student and mentor will begin a relationship that continues through BIBL 988, BIBL 989, and BIBL 990 (all of which function as independent study courses).

Step 3. The official "working" mentor/student relationship will begin in BIBL 988. For the balance of BIBL 987, the student will focus on completing comprehensive exams (if still not satisfactorily approved), and will continue to engage in preliminary reading and research relevant to their dissertation topic.

Step 4. Once the student begins BIBL 988, attention will be given to tangible composition of at least three chapters of the dissertation, along with research relevant to the entire dissertation product. The mentor will provide feedback as chapters are written. It is expected that the first draft of each chapter will require revision. The BIBL 988 class will result in a substantive portion of the final dissertation product. If the mentor deems sufficient progress has been made in terms of quality and quantity (at least 35% of the final anticipated dissertation product), then approval will be granted by the mentor for enrollment in BIBL 989. Otherwise, students will reenroll in BIBL 988.

Step 5. With BIBL 989 dissertation composition continues through the process of chapter by chapter development until the final draft of the full dissertation product is completed. Writing takes place under the guidance of the dissertation mentor, with regular direction the normal expectation through this process. However, the dissertation mentor is not a proofreader or composition editor; clarity and style are the responsibility of the student. Nor should the dissertation mentor ever be expected to complete the research for the student.

Additionally, during the first three weeks of the BIBL 989 course, in consultation with the dissertation mentor, a faculty reader will be secured. The faculty reader will provide a second opinion on the final dissertation product, and will provide feedback in the final stages of BIBL 989 in preparation for the dissertation defense in BIBL 990.

Step 6. Once the dissertation is completed and modified in consultation with the dissertation mentor and the faculty reader, the student is ready to enroll in BIBL 990. If a clean version of the dissertation is not ready by the close of the BIBL 989 course, students should enroll in an additional term of BIBL 989, and continue to do so until a finished version of the whole dissertation is produced and approved by the dissertation mentor and the faculty reader. The final dissertation product should be 50,000 to 80,000 words, exclusive of front matter and bibliography. Exceptions to this standard must be approved by the dissertation mentor and faculty reader in consultation with the PhD in Bible Exposition director prior to enrollment in BIBL 990.

Step 7. Upon enrollment in BIBL 990, students will submit their final draft for final review by the dissertation mentor and the faculty reader. Once recommended edits and adjustments are made in response to feedback, the student is ready for their dissertation defense.

Step 8. The dissertation mentor, in conversation with the faculty reader, and with approval of the PhD in Bible Exposition program director, will schedule an oral dissertation defense (BIBL 990). The oral defense will normally be scheduled 2 to 4 weeks from the completion of BIBL 989.

Step 9. The oral defense will take place during the date and time determined per step 8. During the defense, students will have thirty minutes to present their dissertation thesis and findings. Students may defend in-person or virtually; this may be determined as best suited to the situation of dissertation mentor, faculty reader, and student (all three must be present for the defense, whether set virtually or in-person). Following the initial student presentation, thirty minutes is allowed for the mentor and reader to ask questions regarding methodology, literature, conclusions, and/or other features of the written work. Upon completion of the oral defense, the mentor and reader will together assign a grade that reflects a complete assessment of the written dissertation and oral defense (in combination). The final draft and oral defense must together be worthy of a minimum grade of B- or BIBL 990 must be repeated.

Step 10. Students will deposit the thesis with the Jerry Falwell Library according to current guidelines set by the University. Dissertation submission guidelines must be followed precisely.