

Step III Composition

How does the pericope function within the compositional whole of the author's work?

This Step takes seriously the notion that an author has a purpose in mind by the choice of starting point, sequential development and conclusion. The chain one holds at either end is held together by its links; a literary composition is similarly structured. The exegete seeks to understand the pericope at hand here in this step in terms of that linked whole. Starting with the focal pericope one asks about the links preceding and following it to see how they are related. What emerges by moving fore and aft along the compositional line is a growing appreciation for the special intent and theological burden of the author, who also emerges slowly as an historical person through the data and great themes, etc. of her or his composition (important especially when biographical data, such as in the case of Mark, are otherwise sparse).

The practical shape of the Step has three parts:

- a) examination of surrounding pericopes,

- b) grasp of the compositions's overall shape and intent (here in addition to one's own reading of the work and consultation with published introductions to the NT/OT and commentaries in the overview section is recommended),

- c) data gathering on the life and historical circumstances of the author.

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