

## Exegeting a Gospel

**Gain an initial sense of the literary context of the passage in the gospel as a whole.**

- What is its place in the developing narrative?

**Determine the form.**

- Is it, for example, a narrative passage, discourse, parable, pronouncement story, or miracle story?

**Establish the best text.**

- What is likely to have been the original wording? Discuss only significant variants.

**Determine the basic sense of the passage through an analysis of grammar and syntax and an investigation of significant terms.**

- What seems to be the best translation?

[Be selective about how much of this more detailed work is included in the essay. Elaborate only on what is not obvious, what makes a genuine difference to an understanding of the passage, and what is recognized as problematic or controversial.]

**Outline the sequence of events, actions, assertions or arguments in the passage.**

- How is the passage structured?

**Are there any relevant items of historical, geographical, social or cultural background that need research?**

- Trace the tradition history of material in the passage.
- Have sources been used?
- What are they likely to be?
- Can the material be traced back to a setting in the life of the early church?
- How much of the material, if any, can be traced back to a setting in the life of Jesus?
- What is the level of probability you would assign to your findings?

**Investigate the concerns of the evangelist and first readers.**

- What light do the enquiries about form and tradition history shed on the evangelist's redaction-the selection, arrangement, modification and creative interpretation of possible sources?
- Does the passage show evidence of the evangelist's distinctive language, style or concerns?
- Does a comparison with other gospels highlight these?

- Are there any clues about the concerns of the intended readers, to which the evangelist might be responding?
- Can a community or social setting for the evangelist and the readers be inferred from clues within the passage?

**Return to focus on the passage in its final form.**

- How does the passage now function in the gospel's narrative discourse?
- What is its place in the plot?
- What does it suggest about the characters involved?
- Are there any conflicts or resolutions of conflict?
- What is the implied author's point of view in this passage?
- What narrative techniques are employed by the implied author?
- Who are the implied readers and what is the force of the passage for such implied readers?

**In the light of your findings to this point:**

How would you sum up the main thrust of this passage and its function, first as part of the communication between implied author and implied readers and then in terms of what might be inferred about the persuasive strategy of the real author in relation to real readers?[This summary statement may well help to provide the framework for organizing the essay.]

**Reflect on your response to this passage as its reader.**

- How far were you drawn into the narrative world and its values?
- Do you identify with any of its characters?
- How far was its world alien to yours?
- How do you evaluate its point of view?
- How does it relate to other material in the New Testament or the Bible as a whole?How does it function as the Word of God?
- How have others responded to it in the history of interpretation?
- Does it have any bearing on contemporary theological, ethical, spiritual or social concerns?

**Write an exegetical essay that synthesizes your study and reflection in a coherent overall interpretation.**

The essay should provide evidence that you have attempted to understand and interact with the text yourself. But it should also demonstrate that you have compared your approach and findings with those of the major commentaries and relevant journal articles and are able to make appropriate use of secondary literature through quotations and footnotes. It should not, however, become a mosaic of other people's comments. A bibliography of the works you have consulted should be appended.

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