

Survey Skills: The First Step in Bible Study

Why?	To get an overview of the whole book.
Read	Read the entire book—or the section of Scripture—through, at least once, preferably at one time. If possible, read it several times, using a different translation each time.
Main Divisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First, divide the book into its main divisions (perhaps 3-8) and give each one a brief title (1-8 words). Put this material into outline or chart form. • Next, compare your outline to those found in commentaries by thoughtful biblical scholars.
Main Theme	Write out the central theme or “melodic line” of the book in a sentence or phrase and include it in your chart.
Impressions	Note your first or general impressions of the book—anything that stands out to you as you read: questions, facts, tone, etc.
Background	<p>Using a commentary, Bible dictionary, encyclopedia, atlas, handbook, etc., track down whatever information you can find on such things as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the author, • the date the book was written, • the history or culture of the period, • significant extra-biblical events or person of that time, • maps covering the geography mentioned in the text, • facts about the book’s significance in history or literature, • the history of the book’s inclusion in the canon, and • other biblical passages covering the same period.

Observation Skills: Seeing What the Text Says

Why Observe?	To examine the text carefully to see what it says.
Observe Facts	Who? (names mentioned, major and minor characters) Where? (places, travels, geography) What? (actions, events, situations) When? (time, sequence of events) Why? (explanations, statements of purpose)
Observe Repetitions	Note identical words or phrases, similar ideas and themes.
Observe Contrasts	Contrasts are often identified by the use of “but” or “rather.”
Observe Cause/Effect	Where one thing causes, affects, or changes another.
Observe Definitions	Mark words or phrases that should be carefully defined.
Observe Explanations	Where something is defined, examined, explained, or analyzed within the text itself.
Observe General/Particular	Identify where there is movement in the text from a broad idea or concept to a specific one (or vice versa).
Observe Interrogation	The use of questions and/or answers within the text.
Observe Descriptions	Note the adjectives, adverbs, or any other modifiers used.
Observe Climax	This is any arrangement of material in a progression.
Observe Verbs	The verbs used throughout the text often provide insight into the action and/or characteristics of the subject being discussed.
Observe Pronouns	The use of pronouns is often crucial to identifying the narrator and/or understanding the perspective inherent in the text.
Observe Interchanges	This refers to any alternating or exchanging of elements in the text, so that persons, events, or ideas end up being compared or contrasted, implicitly or explicitly.
Observe Quotations	Identify where the text contains quotations of other passages of Scripture, or extra-biblical books, or where this text is quoted elsewhere in the Bible.

Interpretation Skills: Determining What the Text Means

Why?	To reflect prayerfully on the text to determine what it means.
Divisions	Divide the passage into its subsections or paragraphs and give a brief title to each one (1-8 words).
Define Terms	Using a dictionary, commentary, or other reference tool, define important words or concepts.
Reflect on your observations	Determine the significance or meaning of your key observations by asking questions.
Define the Theme	Identify the major ideas and flow of thought or argument.
Accountability	Check that your interpretation is affirmed by secondary standards like the Apostles Creed, Nicene Creed, Westminster Confession, and the Heidelberg Catechism.
Why Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why is this said? • Why is it said here? • Why is it said in this way? • Why is it a surprise?
Imply/Teach Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who or what is involved? • How is this accomplished? • When is this accomplished? • Where is this accomplished? • Why is this accomplished?
Type of Literature	Given the genre of the text, what principles must be kept in mind in the process of interpretation?
Christian World View	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation: What really exists? What is really real? What is the nature of God? of human beings? of family? of society? What is the origin and nature of the world around us? Why is it possible to know anything at all? • Fall: How do we know what is good and what is evil? What is wrong with humankind? With the world? What are the effects of the Fall? • Redemption: What is the solution to what's wrong? How can we work against the effects of the Fall? What do we learn about the people of God? • Consummation: What is the meaning of life? of suffering? of death? What happens at death?
What Do We Learn About Theology?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scripture: revelation, truth, and final authority • God: his nature, attributes, trinity, & work • Mankind: origin, calling, & nature • Sin and the Fall • Salvation • Christ: his nature, incarnation, life, & work • The church • Human history and where it is headed?
Idolatry	What insight is given into non-biblical worldviews?

Application I: the People of God

Our Goal	Allow the truth of the text to order our thinking and lives.
The Key Question	Since this is the Word of God, what do we hear him saying, and what are we going to do about it?
Main Principle	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Draw a primary principle from the main theme, main teaching, or main point of the text 2. Determine how we can make this general principle both personal and particular in our daily lives.
Relationships	<p>What does the text teach us concerning our relationship to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. God <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there a command to obey? A promise to claim? Do I need to pray about something from the text? What should I give thanks for? 2. The Enemy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the passage tell me about something to resist? Or a tactic to recognize? An armor to wear? Or a temptation to recognize? 3. Others <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Within the church? Within the home? Within the wider community and the world? 4. Ourselves <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the text shed light on our experience? On our use of time? Our work, rest, or leisure? Our values, goals, expectations, or priorities? On sins to avoid, or weaknesses to be aware of?
World View	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reflect on the insights concerning Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation that are found in the text. 2. Determine their practical implications. 3. Consider how these insights should change and/or determine our view of life and reality.
Meditation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ask God that His Word might renew your mind and transform your life. 2. Spend time reflecting, thinking, reviewing the passage. Savor it. Go over it. Pray over each part. Let it sink deeply into your consciousness.

Application II: the Wider Culture

Our Goal	To live out and communicate the truth of God in our modern world.		
Ask Four Key Questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is the text teaching? 2. Why do we believe it to be true? 3. How can we live it out before a watching world? 4. How can we communicate it in a winsome way? 		
Identify Spheres of Life	<p>Identify principles in the text to be applied, not simply to our involvement, but also in terms of the meaning and structure of the various spheres of reality including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li style="width: 50%;">• Government, politics, society, nations, & the state <li style="width: 50%;">• Arts & creativity <li style="width: 50%;">• Economics, business, consumerism, & poverty <li style="width: 50%;">• Church, ministry, & spirituality <li style="width: 50%;">• Leisure, entertainment, time, health, humor, & sports <li style="width: 50%;">• Family, home, & relationships <li style="width: 50%;">• Education, history, & learning <li style="width: 50%;">• Work, calling, & vocation <li style="width: 50%;">• Law & justice <li style="width: 50%;">• etc. 		
Examine Alternative World Views	<p>With care, identify common non-Christian answers often given in place of the biblical position.</p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Where everything came from (Creation): What really exists? What is really real? The nature of God? human beings? family? society? What is the origin/nature of the world around us? Why is it possible to know anything at all? 2. What, if anything, is wrong (Fall): How do we know what is good and evil? What is wrong? What are the effects of this problem? 3. How the problem(s) can be corrected (Redemption): What is the solution to what's wrong? How can we work against the effects of what's wrong? How can virtue be encouraged and nurtured? </td> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Where is it all headed (Consummation): What is the meaning of life? of suffering? of death? What happens at death? </td> </tr> </table>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Where everything came from (Creation): What really exists? What is really real? The nature of God? human beings? family? society? What is the origin/nature of the world around us? Why is it possible to know anything at all? 2. What, if anything, is wrong (Fall): How do we know what is good and evil? What is wrong? What are the effects of this problem? 3. How the problem(s) can be corrected (Redemption): What is the solution to what's wrong? How can we work against the effects of what's wrong? How can virtue be encouraged and nurtured? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Where is it all headed (Consummation): What is the meaning of life? of suffering? of death? What happens at death?
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Find Understandable Terms	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify which words, terms, or concepts may not be fully understood by non-Christians. 2. Define each one using simple words or ideas a non-Christian would understand. 		
Speak the Truth Winsomely	<p>Practice communicating the truth of the passage by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Developing questions that reveal the weaknesses of the non-Christian position. 2. Practice communicating the biblical position--both what we believe and why we believe it--in terms a non-Christian can easily understand. 3. Identify common objections a non-Christian might raise and develop reasonable answers. 		