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## A SURVEY OF A BOOK

A survey of an entire book is necessary for the study of its individual passages. A passage can be fully understood only when it is seen in relation to the book as a whole. For that reason, the knowledge of the book as a whole is essential. Since a survey is a general comprehensive study of the book, you must not be bogged down by the details or sidetracked by difficult verses or passages. Always keep the *objective* before you. Make sure you have the following basic tools:

- Bible—use the New American Standard Bible or the New International Version.
- Pencil and paper—always take notes in your Bible study.
- English dictionary—be sure to look up any unfamiliar word in an unabridged dictionary.
- Bible dictionary—get a copy of a good Bible dictionary.

Be aware of the seven “B’s” before you study the Bible:

1. Be alert!—don’t study the Bible with a sleepy head.

2. Be attentive!—don't let the mind wander.
3. Be observant!—don't read aimlessly.
4. Be inquisitive!—don't be content with the obvious.
5. Be diligent!—don't spare any effort.
6. Be persistent!—don't quit.
7. Be honest!—don't fool yourself.

Observe the following steps as you survey a book.

#### GET ACQUAINTED WITH THE BOOK

**Objective:** To learn the general content of the book, its author, recipients, and purpose.

#### STUDYING THE GOSPELS

Read through the entire book at least four times during the week. Be sure to write down your observations and impressions and their references. Learn to organize your notes, charts, and other personal helps in a graphic way so that the information will be easily accessible.

*First day.* Find a block of time that will allow you to read the entire book at one sitting without interruption. Get the feel of the book.

*Second and third days.* Read through the book again. Jot down the characters and indicate their relation to Jesus. Always remember to put down the references.

*Fourth and fifth days.* Again read over the gospel. List the miracles including occasion, nature, purpose, and the reaction of the people. Also indicate what each miracle reveals about the person of Jesus.

*Sixth and seventh days.* Go over the book again. Make a separate list of parables and discourses with a sentence or two to summarize their purpose/message. Also, jot down your observation of Jesus as a teacher in each situation.

It will be helpful if you would jot down questions you would like to ask, topics you would like to pursue, and verses you would like to memorize on separate sheets of paper as you read the book.

#### STUDYING THE EPISTLES

Read the entire book at least once a day throughout the week. Again, put down your observations with the references on separate sheets of paper each day.

*First day.* Read the entire book at one sitting without break or interruption. Get the feel of the book.

*Second day.* Read through the book again. This time read more slowly and carefully. Jot down your observations and impressions concerning the author, such as:

- The name of the author
- The mood of the author as it is reflected in the book
- The whereabouts of the author at the time of writing

- The physical condition or the circumstance of the author
- The life and character of the author.

*Third day.* Go over the book again. This time jot down your observations and impressions concerning the recipients, such as:

- Who are the recipients?
- What is said about them implicitly and explicitly?
- Are there any indications as to their physical circumstances and spiritual condition?
- What was their pressing need? What difficulty did they experience?

*Fourth day.* Read the entire book over again, and note its purpose.

- Is the purpose of the book stated explicitly?
- Is there any indication as to why this book was written?

*Fifth day.* Read through the book again and jot down the time element, and record any geographical references. (If possible, locate those references on a map found in the back of your Bible.)

*Sixth day.* Read through the book once more. State in your own words:

- The central theme of the book
- The main teaching of the book
- The characteristics of the book.

### DISCOVER THE AUTHOR'S BLUEPRINT

**Objectives:** To find out the structure or the outline of the book. To see how the author laid down his material, and how each part is related to one another and to the whole.

#### STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

There are two ways of approach.

*For shorter books such as epistles.*

1. Look for major divisions.
  - a. Go through the book again and notice the major breaks in the thought. Pay close attention to the connectives. In case of a historical book, take notice of the major events, characters, and geographical references.
  - b. Give an appropriate title to each division. Make the title as precise a statement of the general contents of the division as possible.
2. Look for natural subdivisions.
  - a. Go through the major divisions and find natural subdivisions. Again, take notice of connectives, comparisons, contrasts, and repetitions.
  - b. Give a suitable title to each subdivision. If possible, make the titles of the subdivisions relate to the title of the division.

*For longer books such as the gospels.*

1. Begin with paragraphs.
  - a. Read through the book paragraph by paragraph.
  - b. Give a title to each paragraph. A title must be brief, just a word or a phrase.
2. Combine paragraphs into units.
  - a. Go through the paragraphs and combine those that are logically related into a unit. Logical relation may be in terms of thought, event, or character.
  - b. Give an appropriate title to each unit.
3. Combine units into sections, and sections into divisions.
  - a. Following the procedure mentioned above, combine the related units into sections, and sections into divisions.
  - b. Again, give a title to each section, and then to each division. The title should be precise and terse, yet one that well summarizes the general content of the section or division.

#### STRUCTURAL RELATIONSHIP

*Draw an outline of the book.* Review the structural analysis and work out an outline of the book.

*Discover the structure of the book.* Study the outline of the book until you see how each part is related to

the other and to the whole and how the author unfolds his thought and accomplishes his goal.

#### CONSULT OUTSIDE AIDS

Objectives: To compare the results of your own study with those reached by others, and to obtain the background information that is difficult to gather from the book itself.

#### COMPARE THE RESULTS

When you have finished the first two steps, you should consult a good dictionary or commentary.

#### OBTAIN THE BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Read the introduction to the book under survey in a good Bible dictionary or commentary. Jot down information such as:

- Author
- Recipient
- Purpose
- Date and place of writing
- Characteristics of the book
- Outline of the book.

With the epistle, also take notice of:

- The origin of the church
- The historical, cultural, political, and religious background of the city in which the church is found
- The geographical location of the church and its significance.