

Making Biblical Bookcharts

Our Basic Charting Methodology

1. Read for the BIG PICTURE of your biblical book or passage.

● **You are now reading through the entire biblical book you are studying *at a brisk pace in one sitting.***

This is likely a very different kind of reading for most folks. It is a style of reading that you will need to learn if you have been taught primarily *analytical interpretation*. This is now adding the set of skills that we call *synthetic interpretation*. We are now interested in *the bird's-eye view, rather than the worm's-eye view of the biblical text*.

● **Your goal in reading is to get the big idea of the flow of the argument.**

So, don't get bogged down in a lot of the details or in various kinds of issues and questions at this point. Additionally, you will need to use a translation of the Bible that is a bit kinder and gentler for this kind of panoramic reading. In other words, you need to use a dynamic equivalent translation like the NIV or perhaps like the ESV.

● **In particular, your goal is to see the interrelation of the parts as you understand the whole of the biblical book/particular passage as you see the argument of the book/section unfold.**

We are creating a learning tool that has *a visual element* to it. This is a foundational uniqueness of bookcharts that must be kept in mind when creating the chart. We want to take full advantage of the eye-gate and add this panoramic dimension to the learning process.

● **So much of the meaning of any text is in the relationship of the parts of the text to one another.**

Again, sadly this is generally not an interpretive skill that we have developed in our study of God's Word with God's people. We spend most of our time breaking up a biblical book into parts, rather than seeing the whole of its argument. We're worm-oriented, not bird-oriented.

(Perhaps this helps contribute to the destructive "I'm a worm-theology" of the Church!)

● **Your goal in reading is now becomes your goal in writing: to state the purpose of the biblical book or section of the biblical book.**

At the end of each reading, *write down a purpose statement for the biblical book or section of a book*. This is a statement that begins with the word "to", e.g., "to correct a rebellious church..."

Now repeat this and read through the book/section again in one sitting (perhaps from a different translation) and *seek to improve upon your purpose statement with each reading*. Repeat this process as many times as you can, depending on the length of the book.

● **Most biblical students are far too general in their purpose statements when they are first starting to make biblical bookcharts.**

The goal is to be as specific as the biblical text is!

● Don't principlize the text at this point as if you were writing a sermon or biblical talk!

- Don't primarily use the language of the audience you want to teach; rather, keep the language of your purpose statement in the language of the biblical text.
- An exhortation to those with the grace-gift of exhortation: The goal is not to make applications at this point! This comes later in the process. Your goal at this point is to understand the biblical text in a synthetic manner so that you can *later* make cogent applications. Don't rush the process! I know your passion because I'm married to an exhorter!

Examples of Purpose Statements

By Walt Russell

The Purpose of 1 Samuel: to record the ending of the theocracy and the founding of the monarchy in Israel when God's people reject Yahweh as King and He uses Israel's last judge and first prophet, Samuel, to anoint the unfaithful King Saul and later the theocratic King David, from whose permanent dynasty the Messiah would come.

The Purpose of Psalm 8: to praise the majesty of God and His name in all the earth through His displaying of His splendor in very unexpected ways by using the praise of Him by small, young children as a bulwark against His enemies and by crowning seemingly small, insignificant humankind with the glory and majesty of ruling over God's creation.

The Purpose of Hosea: to show Israel's unfaithfulness to Yahweh and the Mosaic Covenant by illustrating Gomer's unfaithfulness to Hosea and by a legal exposition of Yahweh's lawsuit against unfaithful Israel and her resulting judgment, yet Yahweh's unceasing loyal love and future restoration of Israel.

The Purpose of Matthew: to prove to Jews that Jesus is the Messiah *and* to explain that the present form of His kingdom until He returns is the unexpected harvest form of making disciples of all the peoples.

The Purpose of Mark: to encourage suffering Roman readers to follow Jesus as the Messiah of all peoples, uniquely authorized to proclaim the good news of God's kingdom and uniquely authenticated by His authority over sin, disease, and the spirit-world, who serves humanity humbly, especially through His atoning death.

The Purpose of Luke-Acts: to provide certainty that God's eternal purpose is to create a people by seeking and saving persons *universally* through faith in Jesus Christ without Judaistic attachments so that God's people will respond in humble, Spirit-empowered obedience to the Son's directing of this universal mission—even though it may lead to suffering.

The Purpose of John: to persuade Jews and Gentiles of the heavenly origin and nature of Jesus the Messiah and His message (through *signs*) which demand a personal commitment to Him (*believe*) which gives eternal life and commissions those who obey Him to proclaim Him and His message to the world (*life*).

The Purpose of Ephesians: to instruct and exhort the church, the Body of Christ formed by redeemed Jews and Gentiles, to function in a manner worthy of her divine calling and to stand firm against the strategies of Satan.

The Purpose of Revelation: to encourage the church to overcome in difficult times by revealing God's ultimate triumph over Satan in the establishing of Christ's kingdom and the new heavens and the new earth.

2. Determine the main contours of the skeleton or the structure of the biblical book.

From your multiple readings of the biblical book, you should have developed some sense of the basic structure of this book and the flow of the argument. **Now is the time to express this structure in your own words. You'll want to answer these questions in the process:**

- The question you are seeking to answer is this: “How did the biblical author (and the Holy Spirit) develop the purpose I determined in #1 above?”
- In other words, how is the purpose statement developed and validated?
- How did the author/Author make their case and prove their point?
- How did they structure their argument?
- How do the various parts of the book relate to one another in developing this big idea?

These are some of the suggestions for making charts suggested by Robert Traina:¹

1. Keep the charts *inductive*. Do not force your idea or someone else's on the text. Develop your own observations rather than running to a commentary or other reference source.
2. Reflect the structural relations within the biblical units and the materials that express these relations (e.g., geography, biography, development of the point, etc.):
 1. Comparison
 2. Contrast
 3. Repetition
 4. Continuity
 5. Continuation
 6. Climax
 7. Cruciality
 8. Interchange
 9. Particularization
 10. Generalization
 11. Causation
 12. Substantiation
 13. Instrumentation
 14. Explanation/Analysis
 15. Preparation/Introduction
 16. Summarization
 17. Interrogation
 18. Harmony
 19. Proportion
 20. Illustration
 21. Bracketing/Inclusio
 22. Announcement of Subject
 23. Hook Words
 24. Chiasmus
3. Charts should contain only the major points of the argument and these should be denoted by darker print, underlining, boxing, encircling, etc.
4. The charts should explain and develop the development of the purpose statement in obvious ways and by using much of the same language.
5. Charts should be continuous and not chopped up into disconnected pieces.
6. They should be self-explanatory and obvious as to the flow of the argument.
7. Sections of charts should be proportionate as to the amount of material they represent.
8. Your chart should follow the chronological order of the text and not rearrange it!
9. Biblical structures vary; some are linear; some are parallel, some are cyclical; some alternate, etc.

¹ Robert A. Traina, “Appendix A—Charts” in Methodical Bible Study (Wilmore, KY: Asbury Theological Seminary, 1952) 236-238.

3. Decide how you want to chart the structure of the book, either vertically, horizontally, or otherwise.

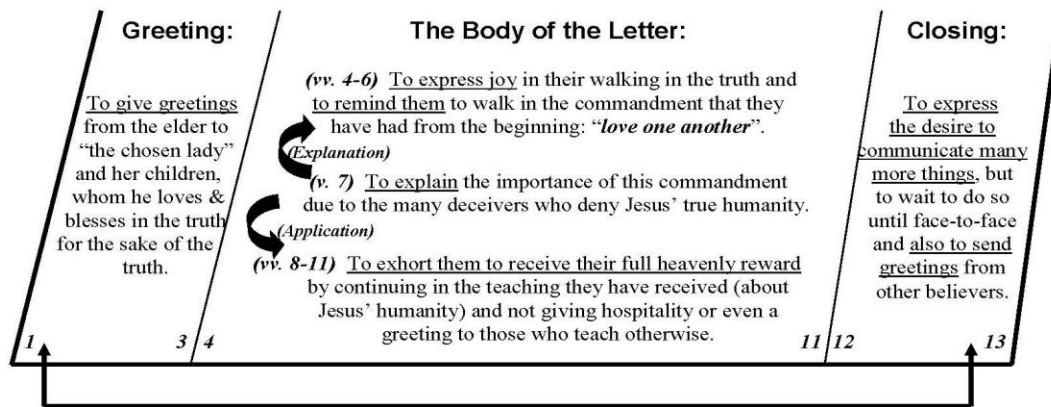
If you decide to create a horizontal chart, you are creating a more visually powerful tool. It is more readily obvious as to the flow of the argument. However, you generally have less room for development of each section with additional descriptive phrases. Nevertheless, you are willing to trade off a bit more development with words for the more visual display of the argument of the biblical book/passage.

See the example of a horizontal chart with this bookchart of 2 John:

2 John

Purpose:

To exhort believers to continue to obey Christ's commandments to love one another and to refuse hospitality and even a greeting to those who deny Jesus' true humanity.
(2 John is perhaps *the cover letter* to the packet of 1, 2 & 3 John)



vv. 1 & 13 = a metaphorical frame for the letter:
church = "chosen lady" in v. 1 and "chosen sister" in v. 13;
believers = "the children" of these ladies in vv. 1 & 13.

Note that horizontal charts also lend to comparison of sections of biblical passages to one another if there is a repeating pattern. See the chart on the 7 Churches of Asia below:

The Seven Churches of Asia in Revelation 2-3

Purpose: to give Jesus' evaluation of the present state of these 7 churches and to exhort them to overcome by faith in Him.

	<u>Ephesus</u> 2:1-7	<u>Smyrna</u> 2:8-11	<u>Pergamum</u> 2:12-17	<u>Thyatira</u> 2:18-29	<u>Sardis</u> 3:1-6	<u>Philadelphia</u> 3:7-13	<u>Laodicea</u> 3:14-22
City's Outstanding Features	Commercial, political, & religious center (Diana's temple). Much immorality. Free city (Acts 19:35)	Seaport with excellent harbor and trade route to east. Proud & beautiful. Pop. = 200,000. Free city. Center of Caesar worship Jewish pop.	200,000 volume library. Worship of Askelpias. Center of Caesar worship.	Trade center (Acts 16:14). Had guilds.	Trade center, especially for dyeing. Worship of Cybele. Loose living.	Grape-growing area. Worship of Dionysus. Earthquakes = outstanding feature.	Banking center. Black wool. Medicines. Water problems = outstanding feature
Summary of Church's Situation	<u>Loveless</u> Good works, enduring & discerning, but left first love.	<u>Persecuted *</u> Spiritual wealth.	<u>Over-Tolerant</u> Steadfast, but tolerated immorality, idolatry, & License.	<u>Compromising</u> Increasing good works, but following Jezebel's doctrines.	<u>Sleeping</u> Only few are faithful, lifeless profession & incomplete works.	<u>Opportunity *</u> Have a little power, keeping His Word, & not denying His name.	<u>Complacent & Rich</u> Spiritual profession, yet spiritual poverty.
Christ's Solution	1) Remember 2) Repent 3) Do the first works (2:5-6)	Fear not & be faithful to death (2:10)	Repent (2:16)	Hold fast to what you already know (2:24-25)	1) Remember what you've heard 2) Keep it 3) Repent (3:3-4)	Hold on to what you've already done for rewards (3:11)	Be zealous & repent & hear Christ's voice & invite Him back into the church to have fellowship with Him (3:19-20)
The Overcomers' Reward	Will eat of the Tree of Life in God's Paradise (2:7)	Will not be hurt by 2 nd death (in Rev 20:14) (2:11)	Will get some of hidden manna & a white stone with a new name on it (2:17)	Will be given authority over nations to rule with iron rod & the morning star (2:26-28)	Will be clothed in white, name not erased from Book of Life & confessed before Father & angels (3:5)	Will be a pillar in God's temple with God's, Christ's, & New Jerusalem's name on you (3:12)	Will sit with Christ on His throne (3:21)
* = no condemnation							

If you decide to create a **vertical chart**, you can generally get more description on your chart. *Vertical charts tend to be more word-oriented than visually-oriented.* In some cases this is very helpful when you want to develop your description of the structure of different sections. You do not want to lose the visual element, but you will generally limit it a bit by doing the vertical chart and adding more words to it.

Remember, the goal of either style of chart is to show the interrelation of the parts to the whole of the book as the argument of the book unfolds. This means that using visual markers will help a vertical chart since it is more word-oriented and is less of a visual resource by design.

See the vertical chart of Hebrews below:

Walt Russell, Ph.D.

THE ARGUMENT OF THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

The purpose of Hebrews: to exhort Christians with Jewish backgrounds that the only appropriate manifestation of their eternal salvation is to persevere in their faithfulness to Messiah Jesus in the midst of earthly persecutions. (13:22 = "this word of exhortation")

- **1:1-4 (Introduction)** God's final, definitive revelation is in His Son Who reigns as Sovereign Lord over the world (i.e., Messiah) and Who has a name that is superior to the angels.

[1:4 announces the theme of 1:5-2:18]



- **1:5-2:18** Jesus has inherited a more excellent name than the angels as Messianic Son (1:5-15) and as Incarnate Brother of Man (2:5-18).

- Jesus has His superiority as **the Messianic Son** (1:5-15):



- **2:1-4 (Exhortation)** Because of this, the Son's partners must pay closer attention to what they have heard lest they drift away and receive a just recompense under the New Covenant and not experience their full deliverance (= full participation in the Son's dominion 1:14, 2:3).

- Jesus also has His superiority as **the Incarnate Brother of Man** (2:5-18):

[2:17-18 announces the 2 parts of the next major section: Jesus is a faithful high priest (3:1-4:13) and a merciful high Priest (4:14-5:10).]

- **3:1-5:10** Jesus is faithful in all things as High Priest and merciful in all things as High Priest.

- Jesus is **faithful** in all things as **High Priest** (3:1-4:13).

- **4:14-16 (Exhortation)** Thus, let us hold fast our confession that Jesus the Son of God is the only high priest we need, so that we can receive mercy and find grace in the time of need.

- Jesus is **merciful** in all things as **High Priest** (4:17-5:10).

[5:9-10 announces the next section of 5:11-10:39 about Jesus' successful ministry as **the High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek.**]



- **5:11-10:39** Jesus is **High Priest according to the superior order of Melchizedek** (7:1-28) and can therefore provide the superior Melchizedekian priestly service of fulfillment (8:1-9:28) and eternal salvation (10:1-18).

- **5:11-6:20 (Opening Exhortation)** The recipients face the problem of sluggishness because of immaturity (5:11-14), which is solved by pressing on to maturity in Christ (6:1-3) and avoiding the alternative of severe judgment (6:4-8), and the author encourages and expects the right choice of pursuing the promises (6:9-12) like Abraham did (6: 13-20).

- Jesus is of the superior Melchizedekian Priesthood (7:1-28)

- Jesus therefore provides the superior Melchizedekian Priestly service (8:1-9:28).

Opening & Closing Exhortations to 5:11-10:39

Opening & Closing Exhortations to 5:11-10:39

•10:1-18 The Old Cov. (Law) and the old priesthood could not make perfect its worshipers and remove the consciousness of sins in spite of continual sacrifices (10:1-4), but Jesus Christ made any other offering for sin unnecessary (10:18) when He offered His own body as the once-for-all-for-all-time sacrifice (10:5-18).

•10:19-39 **(Closing Exhortation)** Therefore, the recipients should not despise the New Covenant with its greater access to God (10:19-25), because it also has greater punishment for willful sinning than the Old Cov. (10:26-31) and the remembrance of their former days of steadfastness in the midst of persecution should give them confidence to endure in faithfulness (10:32-39).

*[10:36-39 announces the next section of 11:1-12:13 and its two sections on **faith** (11:1-40) and **endurance** (12:1-13).]*

●11:1-12:13 The faith of the believers of old demonstrates the kind of endurance that is required if we are to inherit the promises.

•11:1-40 The faith of the believers of old demonstrates that the choice to endure is likely only if we are convinced of and make choices according to the worldview that includes unseen realities and eternal rewards (11:1-12) and that focuses on our heavenly home and alien lifestyle on earth in which we risk all for Christ (11:13-40).

•12:1-13 Therefore, we are called to discipline ourselves to endure in this heavenly focus upon Jesus while realizing that God's Fatherly disciplining of us as partakers is to make us righteous, if we are trained by it.

[12:13 announces the next section on "making straight paths."]

●12:14-13:17 We must "make straight paths" for ourselves in a very specific manner and in several specific areas.

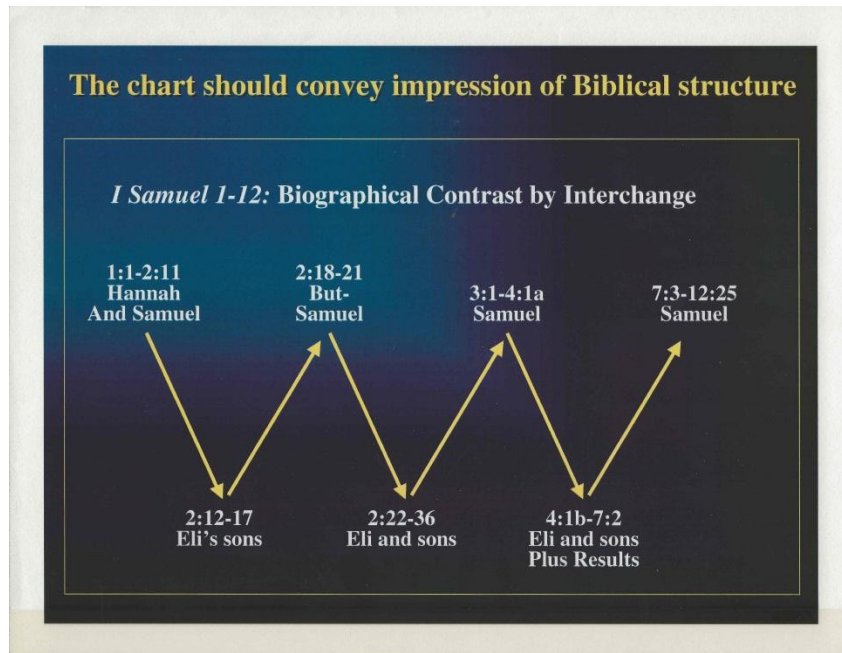
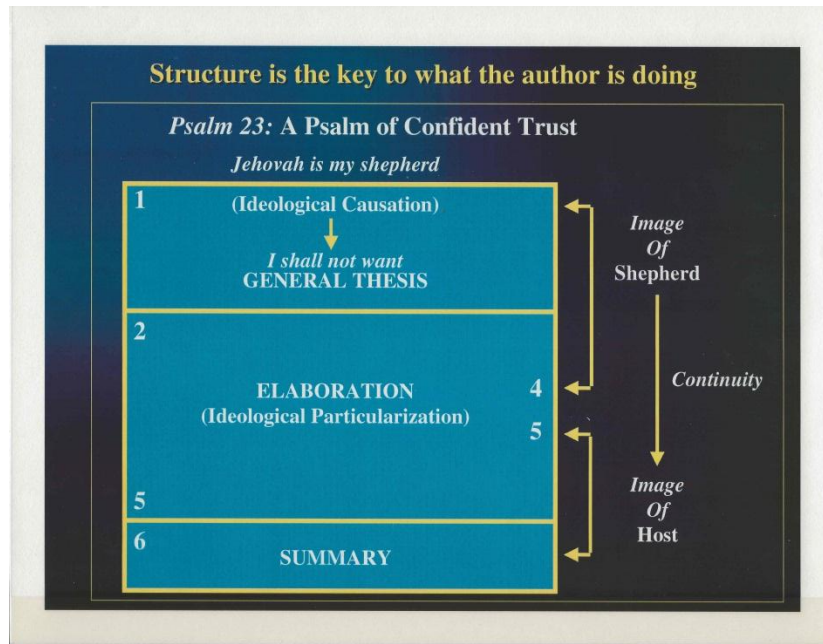
•12:14-17 The specific manner of our straight paths is one of pursuing peace and sanctification and not being shortsighted like the immoral and godless Esau who sold his inheritance for immediate gratification and could not then find a place for repentance.

•12:18-29 For several reasons, the recipients should not be like Esau: the Old Cov. was initiated under fearful and awesome conditions (12:18-21); however, the New Cov. is even more awesome because of its heavenly nature (12:22-24); the recipients should see to it that they hear God's voice from heaven, not focus on earthly, transient things, but rather focus on His kingdom, which cannot be shaken (12:25-29).

•13:1-17 The recipients should make straight paths for themselves in the specific moral areas of personal kindness (13:1-3), sexual purity (13:4), and financial contentment (13:5-6) and in their specific response to Christian leaders (13:7-17).

●13:18-25 **(Conclusion)** The author concludes with a request for prayer (13:18-19), a benediction for equipping for ministry (13:20-21), closing exhortations (13:22-23), and final greetings (13:24) and a farewell (13:25).

Note also these types of bookcharts from Traina:²



² Robert A. Traina, "Appendix A—Charts" in *Methodical Bible Study* (Wilmore, KY: Asbury Theological Seminary, 1952) pages 239 and 243, respectively.