

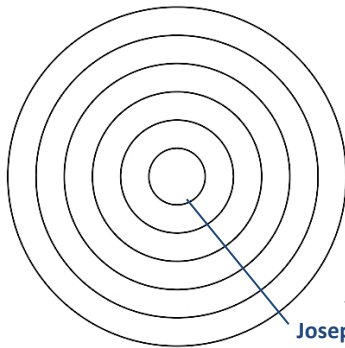
Interpreting a Biblical Passage

Charting an Extended Discourse

1. Skim-read the extended discourse surrounding your passage to get a sense the “big picture.” Use a Bible with paragraph divisions (e.g., *NIV*), and refer to the Bible’s **section headings**.

A “discourse” is a *thought unit* that binds together smaller, related thought units.

For example: the story of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife (Gen 39.1-20) is part of a **smaller extended discourse** focused on Joseph in prison (Gen 39.21-41.40), an even **larger extended discourse** focused on Joseph’s life (Gen 37-50), and an even **larger discourse** describing the line of the Patriarchs: Jacob (Gen 27-36), Isaac (Gen 21-26), Abraham (Gen 12-23), all tracing Israel’s existence from the creation of the world (Gen 1-11).



Joseph and Potiphar’s Wife in Its Extended Discourses

Creation of the World and Israel (Gen 1-11)

Life of Abraham (Gen 12-23)

Life of Isaac (Gen 27-36)

Life of Jacob (Gen 27-36)

Life of Joseph (Gen 37-50)

Joseph in prison (Gen 39.21-41.40)

Joseph and Potiphar’s wife (Gen 39.1-20)

2. Read the discourse again, this time **marking it up** with your pen and a straight-edge. Look for:
 - The main idea of each paragraph – often appears in the first or last sentence – or both.
 - Repeated words and phrases
 - Contrasts (often with the word, “but”—e.g., “I am weak **but** He is strong”)
 - Comparisons (words like “like,” “as,” “such as,” “as it were”—e.g., “Your opponent, the devil, prowls **like** a roaring lion”)
 - Similes (two or more words used to describe the same thing—e.g., “Your **opponent**, the **devil**, prowls like a roaring lion”)
 - Expressions of time (words like “until,” “then,” “when,” “after;” or descriptions of time—e.g., “on the tenth day of the eleventh month”).
 - Conjunctions (“joining words” – “and,” “but,” “for,” *etc.* What do they join?)
 - Introductory formulas (phrases like “I want you to know”; “I write thee things so that”)
 - Concluding formulas (words like “therefore,” “wherefore,” “for,” “for this reason,” “finally,”—e.g., “For this reason I, too, on hearing about your faith...”). Whenever you see a term of conclusion, you can often summarize what has come before it.
 - Verb tense (past, present, future) and mood (is it a *statement?* a *wish?* a *command?*)
 - Themes, big ideas
 - Changes of character, audience, subject matter
3. Make an **outline** of the discourse. Group whole sections of thought together (usually 1-4 paragraphs), asking *what is the main point or theme?* Assign a **brief**, descriptive title for each section and create an **outline** that displays how the sections all connect together.
4. Compare your outline with three sources (commentaries, study Bible), adjusting as you see fit.

Example: Charting 1 John

Ch.	Vs.	Paragraph Description	Outline
1	1-4	A testimony of personal experience with the Word (Jesus).	I. Credentials of the Apostle (1:1-4)
	5-7	Walking in darkness or light.	Walking in the Light (1:5-2:11)
	8-10	Denying and confessing sin.	A. The Obligation to Righteous Living (1:5-2:6)
	1-2	Don't sin but if you do we have an advocate.	B. The Obligation to Love I (2:7-11)
	3-6	Knowing, obeying and walking as Jesus.	Affirmation to the Church (2:12-14)
	7-8	Writing an old and a new command.	Warnings About the World (2:15-17)
	9-11	Love and hate corresponds with light and darkness.	Discerning Spiritual Reality I: Obligation to Confess Jesus (2:18-27)
	12-14	Writing children, fathers, young men re: forgiveness, knowing Him, overcoming.	A. Identification of False Teachers (2:18-19)
	15-17	Loving the world vs. obeying God.	B. Spiritual Position and Obligation to Confess Jesus (2:20-26)
	18-19	The antichrist and people leaving.	The Obligation to Righteous Living II (2:28-3:9)
20-23	Knowing the truth and recognizing the liar.	Joining <u>Link I</u> : Joining Obligations to Righteous Living and to Love (3:10)	
24-25	Exhorted to keep what was heard in the beginning.	Obligation to Love II (3:11-22)	
26-27	Temped but kept by the anointing to remain in Him.	Joining Links	
28	Continue in Him to be unashamed.	A. <u>Link II</u> : Joining Obligation to Love with Obligation to Confess Jesus (3:23)	
29	Knowing Him and those born of Him.	B. <u>Link III</u> : Joining Obligation to Love and Confess with Obligation to Righteous Living (3:24a)	
3	1-3	We are children of God and will see Him.	C. <u>Link IV</u> : Joining All Obligations with Spiritual Reality (3:24b)
4-6	Continuing in sin means we don't know Him.	Discerning Spiritual Reality II: Obligation to Confess Jesus (4:1-6)	
7-10	Sin reveals children of God and children of devil.	Obligation to Love III (4:7-12)	
11-15	Love your brother; hatred makes you a murderer.	Joining <u>Link V</u> : Joining Obligation to Love with Obligation to Confess Jesus with Spiritual Reality (4:13-16a)	
16-20	Love is an action helping needs.	Obligation to Love IV (4:16b-21)	
21-24	Obey God's command.	All Obligations (5:1-5)	
4	1-3	Spirits of God and the antichrist.	[Grounds for] Obligation to Confess Jesus (5:6-12)
4-6	Recognizing those from God and from the world.	Assurance of Prayer (5:13-15)	
7-12	God's love and our love.	XVII. Obligations to Those who Have Left the Faith (5:16-17)	
13-16a	Knowing that God lives in us.	XVIII. Concluding Remarks (5:18-21)	
16b-18	Living in God means living in love.		
19-21	Hating your brother means not loving God.		
5	1-5	Believing in Jesus, loving His child and obeying Him.	
6-12	Testimony regarding Jesus.		
13-15	Confidence that God hears us.		
16-17	Sins leading to/not leading to death		
18-20	Knowing we are God's children.		
21	Keep yourself from idols.		

Important Words and Phrases:

- “From the beginning”
- “Jesus Christ”
- “truth”
- “sin”
- “dear children”
- “know”
- “I write this to you”
- “you have heard”
- “obey”
- “commands”
- “love”
- “hate”
- “light”
- “darkness”
- “brother”
- “dear friends”
- “evil one”
- “the world”
- “antichrist”
- “anointing”
- “Son”
- “eternal life”
- “righteous”
- “children of God”
- “the Spirit”
- “spirits”
- “in the flesh”
- “overcome”
- “in him”