

How to Make an Informal Outline of a Bible Passage

Remember that the goals of an outline are to:

- Identify the main ideas of a passage
- Place similar or related ideas into common categories
- Make sure that every part of a passage is taken into account and placed into a logical relationship with the other parts.

1. Start by identifying where the passage you are outlining begins and ends.
2. Go through the passage and write brief descriptive statements for each of the events and/or ideas that appear in the passage.
 - Make sure that you have included every idea, event, or action that is referred to.
 - List these in the order they occur in the passage.
 - While information from several consecutive verses can be grouped together under one general statement, do not omit any verses.
 - Place the verse number(s) next to the statement which describes their content.
3. Check to see which of the statements can be grouped together under a more general heading which describes them all.
 - Write several general headings and group the existing statements under them.
 - If an existing statement does not fit together in a category with other statements, it should become a general heading.
4. Check to see if some of the descriptive statements can be grouped together under other descriptive statements.
 - Create sub-points of any descriptive statements that support or describe other statements.
5. Check over your outline to see that it is:
 - Simple (Taken directly from the passage)
 - Short (Covers all the points in a concise, abbreviated way)
 - Sorted (Structure of the outline is the same under each point)
 - Sermonic (Useful for preaching and teaching)

Example Outline of Acts 17:16-34

I. Paul is distressed by the idolatry of Athens (17.16)

II. Paul makes his arguments for Christianity with the people of Athens (17.17-18)

- A. He speaks to Jews [and Gentile converts to Judaism] (v.17)
- B. He speaks to Gentiles of other philosophies and faiths (v.18)
- C. He focuses his message on the resurrection of Jesus Christ (v.18)

III. Paul comes to the attention of the Areopagus (17.19-21)

- A. He is invited to speak publicly (vv. 19-20)
- B. He enters an existing and ongoing philosophical discussion (v. 21)

IV. Paul gives a speech to the leaders of Athens (17.22-29)

- A. He emphasizes the common religious interest that he shares with them (v.22)
- B. He seeks to explain the being they know as “the unknown god” (vv. 23-31)
 - 1. Characteristics of the unknown god
 - a. Created the world (v. 24)
 - b. Does not live in human temples or need human attention (vv.24-25)
 - c. Made and is concerned with every nation
 - (1) All nations were created from one man (v. 26)
 - (2) Established the times/places that each nation inhabits (v. 26)
 - (3) Looks to make contact with people from every nation (v. 27)
 - (4) These truths about God have been recognized by the Athenian’s own poets (v. 28)
 - 2. Implications of understanding this “unknown god”
 - a. Recognize that we all are His offspring (v. 29)
 - b. Recognize that idols do not correctly represent this God because they seem to make Him our “offspring” (v. 29)
 - c. Repent from idolatry (v. 30)
 - d. Recognize that God will judge the world for continued idolatry (v. 31)
 - e. Realize that this judgment will come from one man who has risen from the dead (v. 31)
 - f. Recognize that the resurrection of this man is a proof for all people of God’s power and will judge the nations (v. 31)

V. The Athenian’s respond to Paul’s speech (17.32-34)

- A. Some sneer at the idea of resurrection (v. 32)
- B. Some want to hear more (v. 32)
- C. After Paul finishes his speech, a few people convert to Christianity (vv. 33-34)