

How to Read and Study the Bible

Lesson 3 – Observation

Introduction

An observation is something you see in a verse which is *definitely there*. It is something you can say about a verse which is *definitely true* of that verse. It is anything you can see in a verse and can say about a verse that *everyone will agree* with because they can also see that what you are saying is true. When you think you have stated an observation about a verse but other people disagree, most likely you have not made an observation. An excellent way to start is: Does this verse provide answers to the seven standard interrogative questions — *who, what, where, when, why, how, so what?*

What to Observe

1. Terms

- a. Persons
- b. Places
- c. Objects
- d. Concepts
- e. Literal or figurative?

(A standard Bible dictionary can help to identify terms which are unfamiliar.)

2. Grammar

- a. Identify nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, etc.
- b. Identify subjects, predicates, indirect objects, etc.
- c. Identify the tense of verbs (e.g. present, past, future)
- d. Identify the voice of verbs (e.g. active or passive)
- e. Identify dependent and independent clauses
- f. Identify prepositional phrases
- g. Identify conjunctions and connectives
- h. Identify punctuation

3. Structure

- a. Word order
- b. Phrase order
- c. Event order
- d. Cause and effect
- e. Event and explanation
- f. Term and definition

Things to Observe

- **Repetition of words** – Look for words and phrases that repeat.
- **Contrasts** – Look for ideas, individuals, and/or items that are contrasted with each other. Look for differences.
- **Comparisons** – Look for ideas, individuals, and/or items that are compared with each other. Look also for similarities.
- **Lists** – Anytime the text mentions more than two items, identify them as a list.
- **Cause and effect** – Look for cause-and-effect relationships.
- **Figures of speech** – Identify expressions that convey an image, using words in a sense other than the normal literal sense.
- **Conjunctions** – Notice terms that join units, like “and,” “but,” “for.” Note what they are connecting.
- **Verbs** – Note whether a verb is past, present, or future; active or passive; and the like.
- **Pronouns** – Identify the antecedent for each pronoun.
- **Questions and Answers** – Note if the text is built on a question-and-answer format.
- **Dialogue** – Note if the text includes dialogue. Identify who is speaking and to whom.
- **Means** – Note if a sentence indicates that something was done *by means of* someone/something (answers “how?”). Usually you can insert the phrase “by means of” into the sentence.
- **Purpose/result statements** – These are a more specific type of “means,” often telling why. Purpose and result are similar and sometimes indistinguishable. In a purpose statement, you usually can insert the phrase “in order that.” In a result clause, you usually can insert the phrase “so that.”
- **General to specific and specific to general** – Find the general statements that are followed by specific examples or applications of the general. Also find specific statements that are summarized by a general one.
- **Conditional clauses** – A clause can present the condition by which some action or consequence will result. Often such statements use an “if . . . then” framework (although in English the “then” is often left out).

- **Actions/roles of God** – Identify actions or roles that the text ascribes to God.
- **Actions/roles of people** – Identify actions or roles that the text ascribes to people or encourages people to do/be.
- **Emotional terms** – Does the passage use terms that have emotional energy, like kinship words (father, son) or words like “pleading”?
- **Tone of the passage** – What is the overall tone of the passage: happy, sad, encouraging, and so on?
- **Connections to other paragraphs and episodes** – How does the passage connect to the one that precedes it and the one that follows it?
- **Shifts in the story/pivots** – Is the passage being used as a key to understanding a dramatic shift in the story?
- **Interchange** – Does the passage shift back and forth between two scenes or characters?
- **Chiasm** – Does the passage have any chiastic arrangements, like a-b-c-d-c'-b'a'?

Duvall, J. Scott, Hays, J. Daniel, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*, pp. 76-77