

LBC | *How To Study Your Bible 101:* *Observation*

1. While the Bible is a unique book it has been delivered and preserved using normal human language. As we approach the topic of Bible study there are three basic components or steps that we will talk about. They are as follows...

Observation: taking note of what is before you in the text. What does it say?

Interpretation: drawing conclusions about what the text means. What does it mean?

Application: thinking through how the text might shape your life. How does it apply to me?

2. Observation is not something that can be skipped over. It is the foundational step that gives way to right interpretation and relevant application. As we observe the text we need to do so...

Thoughtfully: be a detective!

Repeatedly: re-read the passage over and over again.

Patiently: don't rush. Slow and steady wins the race in this step.

3. Let's look now at how we make observation...

A. Take note of the meaning of words. Words carry innate meaning but their meaning is shaped by the context. For example, the word "trunk" can refer to part of a tree, a storage box, or part of an elephant.

B. Pay attention to structure. Let paragraph divisions guide you. As a general rule, these petition off not only chapters but also the author's flow of thought.

C. Remember to consider the context. Context is king! Make sure to pay attention to what is before and in front of the text. For example, Psalm 119 is all about the Word of God and Romans 9-11 addresses God's relationship with Israel and the nations.

D. Repetition is there for a reason. Paul uses the word "love" in 1 Corinthians 13 a lot because he wants you to know he is talking about...love.

E. "Relationships" reveal a lot about what the author is saying. Cause and effect. If...then. Questions and answers. Comparison and contrast. See 2 Chronicles 7:14, Psalm 24:8, Matthew 5:21.

F. Ask the "what does this passage tell me about..." question. About God the Father, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, man, temptation, sin, salvation, the Christian life, the world, the flesh, the devil, the end times, etc.

G. The "W" questions can help you in this step especially in a narrative setting. Who is speaking? Who is this about? Who are the main parties? What is the subject and/or event covered in this chapter and/or paragraph? What instructions are given? When do or will these events occur?

LBC | *How To Study Your Bible 101:* *Interpretation*

1. Observation, interpretation, and application are the three steps one should follow in reading and studying their Bible. All three are essential to understanding the Word of God.

Interpretation is the art of drawing conclusions about what the text means. Observation asks “What does the text say?” Interpretation asks “What does the text mean?”

Understanding the meaning of the text is extremely important. Consider the story of Philip in Acts 8. Here Philip, as he approached the eunuch’s chariot, asked him if he understood what was before him. Acts 8:30-31: *So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, “Do you understand what you are reading?” And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him.* It was only after the Ethiopian eunuch understood the meaning of Isaiah’s words that he believed on Jesus Christ.

2. Already having talked about how to make observations let’s talk about how to interpret the text...

A. Aim to find out what the author is driving home. We are concerned with discovering what the author, whether it’s Moses, David, or Paul means to convey in any given passage. Don’t read an idea into a verse or paragraph that is not there. Extract, pull out, the meaning from the words before you.

B. Pay attention to the normal rules of grammar. A text’s meaning will reside in how its nouns, verbs, and other forms of speech come together.

C. Keep in mind the rule of “single-meaning.” A passage will not have multiple meanings. It will have one meaning. It’s not uncommon to hear someone say “This passage means this for me, but it may mean something else for you.” Throw this kind of thinking out the door! A passage could have multiple applications, but it only has one meaning. (We’ll talk about how this relates to prophecy down the road.)

D. Remember that context is king. Always read what is before and in front of any given text. John 3:16 is a wonderful verse but it doesn’t stand alone. It follows the conversation that Nicodemus had with Jesus which began in John 3:1. It also, in some English translations, starts out a new paragraph.

E. Interpret Scripture with Scripture. Remember that all Scripture is inspired. So if you are having trouble grasping the meaning of a text look to see if there is another passage that sheds light on the one you are having trouble with. At the same time, be careful not to assume that the same word or phrase in two different passages means the same thing. Contrast Romans 1:11-12 & 12:6.

F. Try your very best to formulate the meaning of a passage in one sentence. “John 3:16-21 tells us what the coming of Christ accomplished for those who believe on Him while also highlighting the plight of those who don’t believe on Him.”

LBC | *How To Study Your Bible 101:* *Application*

1. Observation, interpretation, and application are the three steps one should follow in reading and studying their Bible. All three are essential to understanding the Word of God.

Application is the task of thinking through how the text might shape your life. Observation asks “What does it say?” Interpretation asks “What does it mean?” Application asks “How does it apply to me?”

2. Knowledge of the Bible and a correct understanding of what it says are important. God’s truth, though, is not just something to be known but also embraced, lived out, and submitted to.

James 1:21-25: *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. ²⁵But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and **continues in it**, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.*

3. A good way to think through this step is to filter the text’s meaning through a series of questions like the following...

- A. Is there an example for me to follow?
- B. Is there a sin to avoid?
- C. Is there a promise to claim?
- D. Is there a prayer to repeat?
- E. Is there a command to obey?
- F. Is there a condition to meet?
- G. Is there an error to mark?
- H. Is there a challenge to face?

4. 2 Timothy 3:16 says that that “*all Scripture is given by inspiration of God.*” Does this mean that we should apply all of Scripture in the same way?

The question comes up often of how the follower of Jesus, living this side of the cross with a completed New Testament in their hand, should apply the Old Testament law. Here are a few thoughts to help us think through this issue...

- A. Remember that the Old Testament law was given to the nation of Israel. Those who are following Jesus between the day of Pentecost and the Rapture make up the church.
- B. Keep in mind that the Old Testament law can be divided up into three sections: moral, civil, and ceremonial. With a few exceptions (i.e. the Sabbath requirements) the moral aspects of the law are carried over into the New Testament and laid upon the shoulders of the church.
- C. When thinking through the civil and ceremonial aspects of the law try and find a timeless principle that you can apply. Try as well to find that principle in the New Testament.

LBC | *How To Study Your Bible 101: Old Testament Tips*

1. When studying Old Testament (hereafter OT) narrative there are a few things to keep in mind. The following tips should help you in drawing good and faithful conclusions.¹

A. An OT narrative usually does not directly teach a doctrine. A pastor teaching that we should bring a tithe/offering every Lord's Day?

B. An OT narrative can illustrate a doctrine or doctrines directly taught elsewhere in the Bible. See what Paul does with OT narrative in 1 Corinthians 10:6-11.

C. Narratives record what happened – not necessarily what should have happened or what ought to happen every time. Therefore, not every single OT narrative has an identifiable moral application. See Ezra 5:1-5 for an example.

D. Many, if not most, of the folks in OT narrative are far from perfect. Therefore we should not seek to emulate them in every instance. King David was a man after God's own heart but also a murderer and adulterer.

E. All narratives are selective and incomplete. Not all relevant details are given to us. Therefore what we should pay attention to is right in front of us. Don't speculate about what is not there. We are not told much if anything about what David was thinking and feeling as he faced Goliath in 1 Samuel 17.

F. In the final analysis, God is always the central figure of OT narrative. The book of Job?

2. It can be very easy to get lost in the details of OT. Keep the big picture in mind at all times! The big picture has to do with the covenants God made with the nation of Israel. Think of these covenants as the pair of glasses through which you should read the OT.

A. The Abrahamic Covenant: Genesis 12: 1-3, 7: *Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. ²I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."* Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land."

B. The Davidic Covenant: 2 Samuel 7:12-16: *"When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. ¹⁵But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. ¹⁶And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever."*

C. The New Covenant: Jeremiah 31:31-34: *Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— ³²not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. ³³But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ³⁴No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."*

¹ Taken and adapted from *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* by Fee and Stuart.

LBC | *How To Study Your Bible 101: Old Testament Tips*

3. The OT is certainly full of stories that are meant to push us in the direction of faithful and righteous living. But that is not all they are for. There is also a Messianic thrust to the OT. You might call them Messianic signposts that are pointing us in the direction of Israel's Redeemer. Jesus highlights this idea when speaking to two men after His resurrection. Let's look at His words and then a few signposts.

Luke 24:44-45: *Then He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me." And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.*

Sign Post #1: Genesis 3:15: *"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."*

Sign Post #2: Psalm 110: *"The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool."² The Lord shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies! ...⁴ The Lord has sworn and will not relent, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." ...⁵ The Lord is at Your right hand; He shall execute kings in the day of His wrath. ⁶ He shall judge among the nations, He shall fill the places with dead bodies, He shall execute the heads of many countries. ⁷ He shall drink of the brook by the wayside; therefore He shall lift up the head."*

Sign Post #3: Isaiah 9:6-7: *For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.*

LBC | *How To Study Your Bible 101: New Testament Tips*

1. The New Testament (hereafter NT) contains a few different types of literature. We need to make sure we understand the type of literature we are studying so that we can best know how to handle what is before us.

A. The Gospels: theological biography. While the gospels are biographies of Jesus, they are nevertheless biographies that teach and instruct the reader about the person of Jesus. See John 20:30-31.

B. Acts: transitional narrative. There is a good bit of debate that surrounds the book of Acts. Is everything in Acts normative for all of God's people? We need to remember that this book covers a period of transition in God's program for the ages. Pay attention to what is normative and what is not. See Acts 2:37-38 and Acts 19:1-7.

C. Epistles: didactic. What we call the "letters" are documents written to address certain individuals or groups of people. They are often, if not always, for the purpose of providing instruction. See 2 Timothy 2:14.

D. Revelation: apocalyptic / prophecy. There are parts of this book that are difficult to understand. Remember that apocalyptic material regularly uses images and even cryptic language. Keep in mind as well that the prophetic thrust of Revelation will coincide with previous prophetic material in the Bible. There are direct connections between Revelation, Daniel, and Isaiah. See Revelation 12 and Revelation 20:1-6.

2. There are four gospels. Each has its own personality and thrust. Keep these in mind as you are studying them.

A. Matthew presents Jesus as the Messianic King. Mathew goes to great lengths to connect Jesus back to the Old Testament. He opens by connecting Jesus to Abraham and David. See Matthew 1:1-17.

B. Mark presents Jesus as the Suffering King. Mark highlights, oftentimes through snippets of information, the idea that Jesus came to serve through suffering. See Mark 10:45.

C. Luke presents Jesus as the Universal King. Luke, being a Gentile, brings to light how Jesus' coming bears upon the whole world. Luke opens up, sort of, by connecting Jesus to Adam. See Luke 3:23-38.

D. John presents Jesus as the Son of God. John stands apart from Matthew, Mark, and Luke in that his goal is to show how Jesus is the eternal Son of God. See John 20:30-31...*but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.*

Note #1 – When studying the life of Jesus it is always helpful to consider the context of His life. There are two things to keep in mind. One, Jesus is living under Old Testament law. Two, Jesus is a Jew and is ministering to Jewish people. So keep in mind the Old Testament and Jewish culture. Background is really important!

Note #2 – Jesus is obviously the focus of each gospel. Directly connected to Jesus, though, is the kingdom. As you read through the gospels you will see Jesus teaching time and time again about the kingdom or you'll see Him putting on display the power and authority of the kingdom. Keep in mind the kingdom.

LBC | *How To Study Your Bible 101: The Word, the Spirit, and Discernment*

1. We know that the Scriptures are inspired by God. Consider the following truths in Psalm 19:7-11 that highlight the supernatural nature of the Word and its ability to produce change in those who embrace it.

- A. The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul. (vs.7)
- B. The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. (vs.7)
- C. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. (vs.8)
- D. The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. (vs.8)
- E. The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. (vs.9)

...More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them Your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward.

2. God's Word is far from being a dry, dusty collection of writings. It is unlike any book ever written. Hebrews 4:12-13 clues us in to this truth.

- A. It is living, active, and sharper than any two edged sword. (vs.12)
- B. It is able to pierce the innermost parts of men. In other words, it is able to touch the soul. (vs.12)

...And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

3. In talking about Bible study we need to include the Holy Spirit in our conversation. 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 helps us think through the relationship between the Word and the Spirit. Consider the following truths from this passage.

- A. The wisdom of God is revealed through the Holy Spirit. (vs.10)
- B. No one knows the mind of God except the Spirit. (vs.11)
- C. Those who are in Christ have the Spirit (vs.12) which means they have the mind of Christ (vs.16).
- D. It is the Spirit that teaches, or you might say imparts, spiritual truths. (vs.13)
- E. The person who does not have the Spirit cannot understand / discern spiritual truths (vs.14).

4. God intends for His people to grow in their understanding and application of His Word. There is a direct connection between embracing the Word by faith and growing in discernment. Let's look at Hebrews 5:11-14.

- A. God intends that we go from drinking milk to eating food. (vs.12)
- B. As we grow in the Word, there will be a corresponding growth in discernment. (vs.14)

The Bible is the most powerful book because it is the only divine book. It can tear you to pieces, split you asunder, but it can also put you back together again so that you are reborn according to the Word, and it can bring you great joy. John MacArthur