



Cutting It Straight

Lesson 5: STEP 1 - Observation

Key Verse: Acts 17:11

“Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily *to see* whether these things were so.”

The Question to Ask

In Bible interpretation, observation asks the question, “What does the Bible say?” Another question we could ask is, “What do I see?” When thinking about observation, the illustration of a detective is helpful. When a detective shows up to the scene of a crime, he doesn’t just look for the weapon. If, within the first minute of arriving on scene, he found the weapon and left the scene, there would many facts he missed in trying to solve the case. A good detective would ask questions such as: How was the weapon used?, What happened to the victim?, Is the victim dead or alive?, Was it a robbery?, Was it suicide?, How many people were involved?, Were there witnesses?, etc. Just as a good detective asks questions, a good Bible interpreter must begin with asking the question, “What do I see?”

Being a Bible Observer

1. Become a _____

We live in a world that is filled with entertainment. Our society has gone from a word-based society to an image-based society who has lost the ability to think. Many people sit in front of a computer or television screen taking in information without ever questioning it because those avenues never give you time to stop and think. Discipline yourself to read. This will help you with reading the Bible as well.

2. Become a _____ Reader

Have you ever read through a text and had to start over because you realized you didn’t understand what had just read? There are many reasons that this happens. It can happen because you are thinking about something else in life. It can happen because you are just trying to get through your reading. It can happen because you get caught up on one word or phrase and focus on that while you continue reading.

Jesus said on at least seven different occasions, “Have you not read?” He said this to the most well-read people of His time. They had read the Scriptures, but they did not understand what they had read. Think about all of the time they wasted in reading something that they did not understand. Take time to slow down and focus on what you are reading so that you can understand it. This will help you in Bible interpretation.

If there are some things that you read that are hard to understand in the Bible, one helpful thing to do is read it in another translation. Some good translations that may help give clarity are NASB, HCSB, NET, ESV, NIV, and NKJV.

3. Get the _____ Picture

This may sound obvious, but in Bible interpretation the believer must begin with reading what is written in the Bible. Some people will pick and choose certain verses they like and never read the entirety of the Bible. Others may read books or listen to podcasts and radio shows *about* the Bible but never open the Bible for themselves. The student of Scripture would benefit greatly from reading through the Old Testament and the New Testament once a year. To be a good interpreter of Scripture, the Bible student must know what is in the pages of the Bible because the Bible explains the Bible.

4. Look for _____

At this point, the Bible interpreter begins to make specific observations. Some things to look for are:

- Key words
- Repeated words
- Names
- Geographical locations
- Quotations
- Questions with answers given
- Something unusual or unexpected

Example: Colossians 1:15–20. What is the key subject? _____

5. Ask _____

Don't be afraid to ask the Bible questions. The Bible can handle all your questions. However, we need to ask questions with humility and a desire to learn the truth (Ps. 86:11; 119:66). If there is something you read that you don't understand, write the question down. Continue reading and see if your question will be answered within the passage. If it is not, then continue to search the Scriptures to find the answer.

Example: Acts 1:8.

Questions to ask:

- Why does the verse begin with "but"?
- Who is the "you" in this verse?
- What is "power" and why do they need it?
- What is a "witness"?
- Why does Luke say "both" and name four places?
- Where is Jerusalem?
- Where is Judea?
- Where is Samaria?
- Where are the remotest parts of the world?

6. Define Terms

If you come across terms that you don't know, get a Bible dictionary to help you understand them. This step will give greater clarity to the overall passage you are studying. Some helpful dictionaries are:

- Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary
- The New Unger's Bible Dictionary

“I study my Bible as I gather apples. First, I shake the whole tree that the ripest might fall. Then I shake each limb, and when I have shaken each limb, I shake each branch and every twig. Then I look under every leaf. I shake the Bible as a whole, like shaking the whole tree. Then I shake every limb—study book after book. Then I shake every branch, giving attention to the chapters when they do not break the sense. Then I shake every twig, or a careful study of the paragraphs and sentences and words and their meanings.”

—Martin Luther

Application

1. Do you have a Bible reading plan?
2. How do you approach Bible reading?
3. What are some distractions that take you away from reading God’s Word?
4. How can you discipline yourself to read God’s Word?