OBSERVATION: Seeing the Whole Book

Objectives

- Learn the steps of observation
- Learn the skills of observation
- Learn the principles of observation
- Learn Step 1: Seeing the whole book
- Learn to use the Book Summary Worksheet Tool
- Practice the skills of observation by identifying the book’s facts in 2 Timothy

Key Verse

Jesus replied, “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.” (Matthew 22:29)

The key verse is Jesus' reply to a question asked by some religious leaders about the resurrection. Jesus told them that their beliefs and teaching were in error because:

1. They did not know the Scriptures
2. They did not know the power of God

Jesus quoted Exodus 3:6, explaining that God spoke to Moses as if Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were living. Unless we develop the
skill of careful reading, we may end up missing important truths. This lesson will explain Observation, the first phase of discovery Bible study.

Overview of observation

A. What is observation?

Observation is looking at something carefully and gathering all the facts about it. From a mountaintop, a whole forest in a valley can be seen. Moving down and into the valley, individual trees can be identified. Eventually, an observer will be able to pick out a tree and examine its leaves. This is much like the steps used to properly observe a Bible text.

Observation is the phase of discovery Bible study in which the student reads a text carefully to become familiar with both the big picture (context) and the details. Observation answers the question: What does the Bible say? The picture used to represent observation shows a person holding a magnifying glass. A magnifying glass is a special piece of glass that makes images larger to help a person see what cannot be seen clearly with one’s eyes. It is a reminder to examine Scripture carefully using the steps described in this manual.
B. Steps of observation

Thorough observation is the foundation for understanding the Bible and applying its truths. All Bible study should begin with prayer! Those who study the Bible need God’s help. Observation includes these three steps:

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<th>Steps of observation</th>
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<td>Step 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seeing the whole book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seeing the parts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Step 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seeing the details</td>
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C. Skills of observation

A skill is an ability developed so that a task can be done well. For example, a person who paints pictures well is said to be a skilled painter. A person who is good at Biblical observation has mastered the skills taught in this manual.

This picture represents a skillful woodcarver who is carving a cross out of wood. It is used to indicate when a skill is taught in this manual.

The following table lists the skills of observation along with the tools associated with them. The lesson in which each skill is taught is also listed.
Table 2.1 Observation skills and associated tools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Associated tool</th>
<th>Lesson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Careful reading</td>
<td>All observation tools help develop skillful reading.</td>
<td>2, 3, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fact finding</td>
<td>Book Summary Worksheet Tool</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying the context</td>
<td>Book Summary Worksheet Tool</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning the text</td>
<td>Paragraph Analysis Worksheet Tool</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying the structure</td>
<td>Outline Tool</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paragraph Analysis Worksheet Tool</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying signpost words</td>
<td>Bible Text Worksheet Tool</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying important repeated words and phrases</td>
<td>Bible Text Worksheet Tool</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating lists</td>
<td>Bible Text Worksheet Tool</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

D. Principles of observation

A principle is a guideline. In this manual, principles provide important guidelines for the skills and tools taught in each lesson. A plumb line is the picture used to identify principles. Correctly building a house and correctly observing Scripture rely on faithfully following guidelines. As a plumb line helps in the building of a house, principles help the student make wise observations. The principles associated with observation follow.

1. **The Bible is the Word of God.** It is true and without error in the language in which it was originally written. Be aware that the Bible version you are reading is a translation. The original Bible languages were Greek, Hebrew or Aramaic.

   *And the words of the Lord are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times. (Psalm 12:6)*

   *Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. (John 17:17)*

2. **Although written by people using human language, the Bible is God's communication to mankind.**

   For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:21)

   See also 2 Timothy 3:16-18.

3. **Let the Bible speak for itself.** The meaning of Scripture must come from the text and not be placed there by the student. Always have the attitude of a new learner when doing observation and do not let your own expectations or desires influence your study.

   I am your servant; give me discernment that I may understand your statutes. (Psalm 119:125)

4. **Read patiently.** Observation is the foundation for interpretation and application. Many errors in belief, teaching and conduct can occur as a result of poor observation. Take time to do it well before moving to the next step in your study.

   Wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. (Psalm 130:5)

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**Step 1: Seeing the whole book**

The purpose of Step 1 is to see the big picture of the Bible book. In Step 1, the Bible student surveys the book as a surveyor does land. If you were to buy a piece of property, you would need to know the boundaries first. The most basic and necessary skill needed in Step 1 is careful reading.

**A. The skill of careful reading**

Various places in the Old and New Testaments contain verses about reading the Scriptures. Consider the following examples:
### Table 2.2 Biblical examples of reading the Scripture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The kings of Israel were required to copy and read the Scriptures.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>When he takes the throne of his kingdom he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priest, who are the Levites. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees. (Deuteronomy 17:18-19)</em></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>There are examples of reading the Bible and explaining the meaning.</th>
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</table>
| *They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read. (Nehemiah 8:8)*  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jesus valued the reading of Scripture.</th>
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</table>
| *He answered, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? … Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? (Matthew 12:3, 5)*  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paul commands believers to read his letter.</th>
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</table>
| *I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers. (1 Thessalonians 5:27)*  
*See also Colossians 4:16.* |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paul writes his letters so that they can be read and understood.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>For we do not write you anything you cannot read or understand. … (2 Corinthians 1:13)</em></td>
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</table>

### 1) Read carefully

When performing observation of Scriptures:

- Read repeatedly
- Read prayerfully
- Read thoughtfully
- Read to see God
Each of these areas is discussed in the following text.

a. **Read repeatedly**

   *I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word. (Psalm 119:16)*

Effective study should always include a plan to read the text many times. With each reading, the text's content becomes more familiar and it becomes easier to answer the questions you are asking of it.

The Bible is different from all other books because its true author is God. It is like a well of water with no bottom. No matter how many times water is taken from this well, it will never run dry. Students will always find more to learn. Study Scripture with eagerness, humility and patience.

If possible, read the whole book of the Bible being studied at one time. Even if studying a part of a book, read the entire book at least once to gain a sense of how the part being studied fits into the whole. Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9. These verses emphasize that it is impossible to read, think or talk about Scriptures too much.

b. **Read prayerfully**

   *Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law. (Psalm 119:18)*

God intended the study of His Word to be something He and the believer would do together. Prayer prepares the heart to receive God’s help. Without His participation, understanding the deeper truths of Scripture would be impossible.

- **Thank** Him for the privilege of having access to His precious Words.
- **Invite** Him to be your teacher each time you read Scripture.
- **Expect** Him to lead you into the truths He wants you to understand.
- **Decide** to live out whatever you learn as He gives you power.
c. **Read thoughtfully**

_I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. (Psalm 119:99)_

Become curious about everything you find in Scripture. Every word or idea is there for a reason, and thorough observation will help you to understand why. Even if you have read a text before, approach it as if seeing it for the first time. Always expect new insights.

d. **Read to see God**

_You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me … . (John 5:39)_

In the previously quoted verse, Jesus tells the Jewish religious leaders that the Old Testament (the only Scriptures available to them at that time) speaks about Him. Although they studied the Scriptures diligently, they missed the main point – that Jesus is the Messiah! The Bible is a book about God and provides a window to see and to know Him better.

When reading the Bible, look for God: Who He is, His likes, His dislikes, what He did and what He is doing. Enjoy the Lord as you see Him in the pages of Scripture. Believers should be growing in their knowledge of God so they can be like Him in both character and works. ☑ Read Philippians 3:10-14.

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**B. The skill of fact finding**

Believers need to inspect Scripture closely and gather as many facts as possible. Look for facts that answer the questions: who, what, where, when, why and how. These facts may be about God, people, places or events. Look for important repeated words and phrases in the Bible text. When looking at the book as whole, look for the following facts.

1. **What kind of literature is it?** There are several types of literature found in the Bible. Each type must be read, interpreted
and applied in different ways. How one reads a prophetic book like Revelation is different from how one reads Paul’s letter to the Colossians. A book may contain more than one of these literary types. The basic types of literature found in the Bible are shown in the following table. For a complete listing, refer to Diagram 1.1 “The Bible: Books categorized by type of literature” in Lesson 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2.3 Examples of Bible literature</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of literature</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative/History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gospel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetry/Wisdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prophecy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Letter (also called an epistle)</td>
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2. **Who is the author?** Does the text actually identify the author? Some books identify the authors and some do not.

3. **Who is the intended audience?** To whom is it written?

4. **What is the historical, cultural and religious setting?** Are there clues that identify historical events, cultural references or religious practices? Are there references that identify what was happening at the time it was written? The following are a few examples of context.
   - **Historical:** Archelaus reigned over Judea (Matthew 2:22)
   - **Cultural:** Obligation to pay taxes to Caesar (Matthew 22:15-22)
   - **Religious:** Passover meal, The Lord’s Supper (Matthew 26:17-30)

5. **Where does this book take place?** Is the geographical location identified?

6. **When did it take place?** When was it written?

7. **What are the main events?** This is especially applicable to narratives and historical books.

8. **Who are the main (primary) characters?**
9. **What are the important repeated words and phrases?** Look for the important repeated words and phrases that are essential to the meaning of the text.

10. **What are the main topics, themes, teachings (doctrines) or problems addressed?**

11. **Why was the book written?** What is the purpose of the book?

12. **What is the verse that sums up the main theme of the Book?**

**Note:** The Book Summary Worksheet is a tool to write answers to the previous questions. Not all of these questions are answered in every book. For example, the author of the book of Hebrews is not identified.

### C. Skill of identifying the context

1) **Context is a guide to meaning**

Context is the whole situation, background or environment in which something takes place. An example of context is: The fish lives in the water. The water is the context. Context is a very important part of observation. When using the discovery method of Bible study, you study the Scripture in the context of the other Scriptures.

Context means understanding how the selected text fits with the surrounding verses and chapters. The context places the words and sentences in the time and place the author wrote them. Context is like bricks that fit together to make a wall. Just like bricks, each verse in Scripture fits together to make a whole thought, idea or subject.

Some Scriptures may appear to have conflicting meanings. Scripture never contradicts itself. It is essential to look carefully to identify the context accurately. This is why it is best to study a whole book of the Bible rather than just a portion of a book. Context identifies the purpose for what is written or spoken. The context determines the text's meaning.
Sometimes it is said that something is taken “out of context.” This means the verse is pulled out of the surrounding text. It is no longer in the historical and paragraph context in which it was written. Taking a Scripture “out of context” often causes it to lose some or all of the author’s intended meaning. The meaning of a verse must be considered with the verses that surround it. Teachings based on Scripture taken out of context are usually full of doctrinal error.

The illustration shows how one piece of a puzzle cannot reveal an accurate image of the completed puzzle. Only when the pieces of a puzzle are joined together, do they reveal the puzzle image. Learning the skills of observation will enable Bible students to arrive at a clear understanding of the context of Scripture.

2) Types of context

When identifying the context, consider the following primary types of context.

- **Smaller context** is the setting of verses immediately before and after the text being studied within the same book. It includes words, sentences, paragraphs and sections of a book that surround a particular verse in a Bible book.

- **Larger context** is the relationship of the text to the whole Bible. To accurately identify the larger context, it helps to become familiar with the whole Bible. Another way to identify the larger context is using cross references.

- **Geographical, historical, cultural, social and religious context** – Part of a thorough observation includes making a list of facts gathered from verses indicating geography, history, culture, social habits and religious references. When analyzed together, these facts become clues to bring into focus what life was like at the time the Biblical text was written. Knowledge of these various types of context is critical to understanding a verse’s meaning.
Book Summary Worksheet Tool

Purpose

The purpose of the Book Summary Worksheet is to help identify the context of the book being studied. It is used to write various observations relating to the whole book. This worksheet consists of 12 questions to be answered about the Bible book being studied. An explanation of each question was given earlier in this lesson in the section called “The skill of fact finding.”

How to use the Book Summary Worksheet

1. Read the questions on the Book Summary Worksheet.
2. Carefully read the Bible book being studied looking for answers to the questions.
3. Write the answers to the questions on the worksheet.
4. Review the completed worksheet to identify the book context.

Diagram 2.1, Book Summary Worksheet Example, provides answers to the first seven questions relating to the book of 2 Timothy.
Diagram 2.1  Book Summary Worksheet Example

### Book Summary Worksheet

**Book: 2 Timothy**

1. **What kind of literature is it?**
   
   *Letter (1:1-2)*

2. **Who is the author?**
   
   *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus (1:1)*

3. **Who is the intended audience?**
   
   *Timothy, Paul’s son in the faith (1:2)*

4. **What is the historical, geographical, cultural or religious setting?**
   
   **Historical & geographical:** Chains (1:16, 2:9), Parchments (4:13), Province – Asia (1:15), Rome (1:17), Antioch, Iconium/Lystra (3:11), Ephesus (4:12, 4:13, 4:20)

   **Religious & cultural:** forefathers (1:3), descendant of David (2:8), Moses (3:8), holy Scriptures (3:15), drink offering (4:6)

5. **Where does this book take place?**
   
   *Paul was the “Lord’s prisoner,” suffering in prison (1:8-9) in Rome (1:17)*

6. **When did it take place?**
   
   *End of Paul’s ministry (4:6-7, 18)*

7. **What are the main events?**
   
   *(Not applicable to this book)*

8. **Who are the main (primary) characters?**

9. **What are the important repeated words and phrases?**

10. **What are the main topics, themes, teachings or problems addressed?**

11. **Why was the book written? What is the purpose of the book?**

12. **What is the verse that sums up the main theme of the book?**
Lesson 2 Activity Assignments

Class Activity
1. Become familiar with the Book Summary Worksheet Tool by discussing the example shown on the previous page. Discuss the given answers relating to questions 1 through 7.

2. Discussion points/questions
   - What is observation?
   - What are the steps of observation?
   - What are the skills of observation?
   - Discuss the principles of observation.

Student Activity
1. Answer questions 8 through 12 on the Book Summary Worksheet Example. **Note:** These answers are provided in Appendix 4.

2. Read the book of 2 Timothy again prayerfully asking the Holy Spirit to teach you.

Further Study Activity
1. Timothy and Paul spent several years in the city of Ephesus ministering to that church. Read the following verses to get more insight into the culture and history of Ephesus. Make a list of everything you learn about the geography, religion, history, culture and society of that city and the believers in it.
   - Acts 19
   - Acts 20:13-38
   - 1 Timothy 1:3
   - Revelation 1:11