

How to Study the Bible 7: Observation – Six Clues in the Text, Part 1

Six clues to look for in Scripture:

1. Look for things that are _____

A. Things that are emphasized may use a lot of _____

- **EXAMPLE: The book of Genesis**
 - Chapters 1-11 cover creation, the fall, the flood, the tower of Babel, etc.
 - Chapters 12-50 cover the lives of only four men: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.
 - The most important thing in the book of Genesis is the family God chose to be His people.

- **EXAMPLE: The lives of the kings from 1 Samuel to 2 Kings**
 - Compare how much space is devoted to telling the stories of Samuel, Saul, David, and Solomon, and how much space is used to tell the stories of the rest of the kings of Israel and Judah.
 - That tells you which stories are most important.

- **EXAMPLE: The New Testament Gospels**
 - God gave us four Gospel accounts of Jesus' life, not just one.
 - Almost one-third of Matthew is about Jesus' teachings.
 - Mark is almost all stories about Jesus except for 2 chapters (4 and 13).
 - All four of the Gospels use much more space to tell us about the crucifixion than they do the other events in Jesus' life.

- **EXAMPLE: Paul's letters**
 - Ephesians 1-3 teaches us what God has done for us.
 - Ephesians 4-6 teaches us what we should do as a result.
 - Romans 1-11 teaches us what God has done for us in through the Gospel.
 - Romans 12-16 teaches us what we should do as a result.

B. Things that are emphasized may be clearly stated as the _____

- **EXAMPLE: The book of John**

***John 20.30–31** Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

- **EXAMPLE: The book of Jude**

Jude 1.3 *Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.*

- **EXAMPLE: The book of 1 John**

1 John 1.4 *And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.*

1 John 2.1 *My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*

1 John 2.12 *I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake.*

1 John 5.13 *I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.*

C. Things that are emphasized may follow a certain _____

- **EXAMPLE: Genesis 2.15 comes before Genesis 3.17-19**

Gen 2.15 *The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.*

Gen 3.17–19 *And to Adam he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; 18 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. 19 By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”*

- **EXAMPLE: Jesus baptism in Luke 3 comes before His temptation Luke 4.**

- **Jesus is approved by God before He is tempted by Satan.**
- **Jesus' victory over Satan did not earn His approval before God.**

- **EXAMPLE: Acts 1.8**

Acts 1.8 *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*

- The order of these four places is the order of the expansion of the Gospel in the book of Acts.
- Think of how much space Luke gives to each of these places and what that tells you about the purpose of the book of Acts.

2. Look for things that are _____

A. Words and phrases

- **EXAMPLE: Psalm 136**

***Psa 136.1–3** Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever.*

*2 Give thanks to the God of gods,
for his steadfast love endures forever.*

*3 Give thanks to the Lord of lords,
for his steadfast love endures forever;*

- The Psalmist repeats those words in all twenty-six verses of this Psalm.
- **EXAMPLE: Hebrews 11**
 - The phrase “by faith” is repeated eighteen times.
 - The writer is writing about different people living in different times under different circumstances, but they all lived “by faith.”
- **EXAMPLE: The book of Judges**
 - The writer begins new sections of the story with these words that tell us why God needed to raise up judges over Israel.

***Judg 17.6** In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*

***Judg 21.25** In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*

B. Events and circumstances

- **EXAMPLE: Jesus’ conflict with the Pharisees in the Gospels**
 - Throughout Matthew and Mark, the writers tell story after story showing how the Pharisees hated Jesus more and more strongly.
 - Again and again, Jesus says and does things that offend them.
 - This helps you understand how they were so filled with rage by the time they crucified Him.

C. Patterns and Comparisons

- **EXAMPLE:** The similarities between the lives of Joseph and Jesus.
 - Favored by his father
 - Hated by his brothers
 - Sold for pieces of silver
 - Suffered unjustly
 - Exalted to the right hand of the king

- **EXAMPLE:** The differences between King Saul and King David
 - Whatever Saul does wrong, David does right.
 - Saul was the people's choice, David was God's choice.

3. Look for things that are _____

A. Things that move from the general to the specific.

- **EXAMPLE:** The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6
 - This chapter begins with a general principle:

Matt 6.1 "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

- When people see you, that will be your reward.
 - God will not reward you.
 - Jesus then applies that general principle to three specific illustrations:
 - The act of giving (vv. 2-4)
 - The act of praying (vv. 5-15)
 - The act of fasting (vv. 16-18)
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- **EXAMPLE:** Creation in Genesis 1
 - The story begins with a general overview:

Gen 1.1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

- The rest of the chapter fills in the specific details:
 - Day one: light
 - Day two: separated water from the skies
 - Day three: dry land and causes plants to grow
 - Etc.

- **EXAMPLE: Paul's description of our salvation in Ephesians**
 - He begins with a general description of our salvation.

Eph 1.3 *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,*

- Then He lists the specific benefits we've received from Christ:
 - He chose us before creation (v. 4)
 - He predestined us for adoption (v. 5)
 - He redeemed us by His blood (v. 7)
 - He forgave our sins (v. 7)
 - He generously gave us grace (vv. 7-8)
 - He made known to us the mystery of His will (v. 9)
 - He gave us an inheritance (v. 11)
 - He sealed us with the Holy Spirit (v. 13)
 - He raised us from the dead (2.1-5)
 - He has seated us in heavenly places in Christ (2.6)
 - He has saved us through faith (2.8)
 - He has created us for good works (2.10)
 - He has brought us near by the blood of Christ (2.13)
 - He has made us one with other believers (2.15-17)
 - He has made us members of His household (2.19)
 - He has made us a holy temple (2.20-22)

B. Questions and answers

- **EXAMPLE: The book of Romans**
 - Romans is written like a legal argument, as if Paul were a lawyer.
 - Paul asks many questions and then answers them.

Rom 6.1-2 *What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 By no means!*

Rom 6.15 *What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!*

- **EXAMPLE: The questions that Jesus asks Peter**

John 21.15 *When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs."*

- **EXAMPLE: Acts 1.8 was the answer to a question about the timing of the coming of the kingdom (Acts 1.6).**

C. Cause and effect

- **EXAMPLE: The spread of the Gospel in Acts 8**

Acts 8.1 *And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.*

- Persecution was the cause.
 - The preaching of the Gospel to new people was the effect.
 - God used persecution to spread the Gospel.
- **EXAMPLE: Nehemiah's prayer in Nehemiah 1**
 - Remember how Nehemiah reminded God of His promises to Israel?
 - God promised that if the people would confess their sin and repent, then God would restore them to their land.
 - Nehemiah was hoping in that cause and effect relationship of God's promise.
 - That's why Nehemiah was so interested in confessing sin.
 - The effect was that God kept His promise.