EXERCISE 1: OBSERVING A PASSAGE OF SCRIPTURE

“What makes one person a better Bible student than another? He can see more, that’s all. The same truth is available to both of them in the text” (p. 51).

If you want to get more out of Bible study, it helps to know what you’re looking for. Use the following list of questions to help guide you in your search of Scripture. You probably won’t use every question for each passage you study, but at least they provide a good starting point. The more completely you can answer these questions, the better you will observe God’s truth, which then provides a strong foundation for interpretation and application.

• Who is the author of the passage?
• Whom is the author addressing? (God’s people? A specific church? Unbelievers?)
• What is the most important term and/or concept of the passage?
• What are the main verbs? What are the tenses of those verbs?
• Are there terms you need to define so you can better understand the passage?
• Are there people or places you need to identify?
• What do you already know about the people and places mentioned?
• Can you identify any cause-effect relationships in the author’s writing?
• In what ways does the passage apply to your own personal life? (If there isn’t an obvious application, is there a more subtle one?)
• What things from this passage might you want to study later in further detail?

You might want to make a copy of this page to place in each of the Bibles you use.
EXERCISE 2: OBSERVING A VERSE

TODAY’S PASSAGE: Psalm 93:1

TIME COMMITMENT: 30 minutes

“Remember, in Observation your main concern is, What do I see? Pay special attention to terms and grammatical structure. Also look at the context” (p. 65).

Let’s try observing Psalm 93:1. Since we’re choosing a psalm, the context of what comes before and afterward may not be as important as in a narrative passage. However, the more you read the psalms, the better you can detect similarities and contrasts.

But for now let’s turn our attention to this single verse:

“The Lord reigns, He is clothed with majesty; the Lord has clothed and girded Himself with strength; indeed, the world is firmly established, it will not be moved.”

Begin by going through the questions on the “Observing a Passage of Scripture” sheet (p. 15). Not all of them will apply, of course. But note the present tense of the verbs. If the psalmist wrote in present tense, does that mean the verse is now past tense?

__________________________________________________________________________________________

What would you say is the main theme of this verse?

__________________________________________________________________________________________

Forget about religious language for a moment. What then comes to mind when you think about a “lord”?

__________________________________________________________________________________________

In addition to the questions already provided, here are a few additional things to observe to get you started:

• What words or phrases are repeated? Why do you suppose they are so emphasized?
• God is described by the terms “majesty” and “strength.” What connection, if any, do these terms have? (Does one necessarily suggest the other?)

• Why did the author suddenly move from describing “the Lord” to writing about “the world”? 

• We all know the earth is turning on its axis. So what does it mean that the world “will not be moved”? 

• Does this verse evoke any positive feelings for you? 

• Might this verse cause less positive emotions for some people (fear, anxiety, etc.)? 

What other observations can you make from this single verse?
EXERCISE 8: READING THOUGHTFULLY

TODAY’S PASSAGE: Genesis 5:21–31; 7:11

TIME COMMITMENT: 15–30 minutes

“The step of observation requires you to assume the role of a biblical detective, searching for clues as to the meaning of the text” (p. 79).

Today’s reading is from one of the “begats” sections of Scripture—the portions we tend to skip over. However, there are some noteworthy people mentioned in this passage. Noah is the most familiar. But in his family tree are a couple of other names you should know.

Methuselah would have been in the Guinness Book of World Records if it had existed at that time. Figure out your year of birth if you were 969 years old today. Based on the changes that have taken place since that year, can you gain any insight into the kind of person Methuselah might have been (provided that his mind was still sharp at his age)?

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

Enoch is another name you need to know. What is significant about his life (5:21–24)?

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

But you don’t have to read very thoughtfully to make these simple observations. If you read closely, like a detective, you might by now be asking yourself, Did Methuselah die in the flood? Figure it out for yourself:

How old was Methuselah when Lamech was born? (5:25) ________________

How old was Lamech when Noah was born? (5:28) ________________
EXERCISE 40: WORKING WITH A SEGMENT OF SCRIPTURE

TODAY'S PASSAGE: Field trip

TIME COMMITMENT: 1–2 hours

“A chart . . . is invaluable, because it gives you a maximum return on your investment in the Bible study process. Every time you come back to this passage, you can pull out your chart and quickly review what the section is all about. You don’t have to start from scratch every time. Neither do you have to rely on your memory” (p. 181).

The next couple of assignments are going to ask you to design your own charts for lengthy sections of Scripture. Before doing so, you might want to take a day for review and research. We suggest you do at least two things to prepare.

1. Review chapters 24 and 25 in Living By the Book. A variety of hints and examples are provided for you there, which should help you start thinking in creative ways. (Several of the key suggestions are reprinted in the next two chapters of this workbook.)

2. Take a “field trip” to a library or bookstore. Spend some time in the biblical reference section, flipping through books to see how many kinds of charts you can find. Some will be rather simple; others will be quite complex. See how various scholars condense and present large amounts of information into an easy-to-read chart.

Don’t go looking for the “right” way to make a chart. Many people might examine the same passage of Scripture and come up with a completely different—yet equally effective—way to present the material. Instead, look more for variety. Then when you begin to think of how to compose your own charts, you’ll have a good assortment of possibilities to get you started.
EXERCISE 41: HOW TO STUDY A SECTION OF SCRIPTURE

1. Read the entire section completely. In fact, try reading it two or three times, perhaps in different translations.

2. Identify the paragraphs, and put a label or title on each paragraph. Remember that the paragraph is the basic unit of study. So it’s important to grasp the main idea or theme of each paragraph, and then state that in a word or two.

3. Evaluate each paragraph in light of the other paragraphs. Use the six clues you’ve already learned: things that are emphasized, things that are repeated, things that are related, things that are alike, things that are unlike, and things that are true to life.

4. Evaluate how the section as a whole relates to the rest of the book, using the same six principles.

5. Try to state the main point of the section. See if you can boil it down to one word or a short phrase that summarizes the content.

6. Keep a list of observations on the section. Better yet, record them in your Bible, using brief, descriptive words.

7. Study the persons and places mentioned. See what you can learn about them that throws light on the section as a whole.

8. Keep a list of your unanswered questions and unresolved problems. Those become avenues for further investigation.

9. Ask yourself: What have I seen in this section that challenges the way I live? What practical issues does this passage address? What change do I need to consider in light of this study? What prayer do I need to pray as a result of what I’ve seen?

10. Share the results of your study with someone else.

These suggestions are reprinted from the end of chapter 24 of Living By the Book. If you desire further review, you’ll find more specific examples in that chapter.
EXERCISE 42: MAKING A START WITH YOUR CHART

1. As you study a text, assign titles and labels to the content in a way that summarizes the material. Be creative. Placing your own titles on the verses, paragraphs, sections, and books of the Bible is one way to “read acquisitively” and make the text your own. They help you retain your insights in neat packages.

2. As you visualize your chart, ask: What are the relationships? What am I trying to show? What’s this chart all about? When I’ve finished it, how am I going to use it?

3. Keep your charts simple. You can always add detail; the challenge is to trim away the clutter. What key ideas, characters, themes, verses, terms, and other data from the text ought to take priority? What is the big idea? What structure needs to be shown? What material do you want to see at a glance?

4. If you find that you’ve got too much material to include in a chart, chop it up and make several charts. By the way, too much unrelated data is a clue that you need to go back to the text and do some more observing.

5. Be creative. There are dozens of ways to show relationships in the text. Let your imagination flow. Draw illustrations or symbols if they help. It’s your chart, so make it work for you.

6. Revise your charts in light of your study. No chart can summarize everything. As you continue to study a passage, you’ll gain new insights that should cause you to revise or even redo your chart. Remember, charts are a means to an end, not an end in themselves. They are useful to the extent that they accurately represent what is in the biblical text.

These steps are reprinted from the end of chapter 25 of Living By the Book. If you desire further review, you’ll find more specific examples in that chapter.
EXERCISE 43: WORKING WITH A SEGMENT OF SCRIPTURE

TODAY’S PASSAGE: Exodus 7–12

TIME COMMITMENT: 60 minutes

“Bible study is information-intensive. If you do the job of observation [as previously described], you’ll have more data than you can possibly handle. And that’s a problem, because what good is information if you can’t access it? . . . Show rather than tell. Summarize your findings in a chart” (p. 184).

Lots of people can tell you that Moses called down several plagues on the Egyptians before Pharaoh would let the Israelites leave. Some people even know there were ten such plagues. But few people are able to quickly list all ten.

Today’s assignment is to create a chart that will help you identify the plagues as well as take note of anything else you feel is relevant about them. (The immediate effects of each one? The reactions of the Egyptians and/or Israelites? The response of Pharaoh to each one? etc.)

The account of the plagues is found in Exodus 7:14–12:42. Your task is to figure how to summarize the key information in that section of Scripture by means of a chart. Use the hints on the previous sheets, and don’t hurry into the project until you have an idea in mind.

Don’t feel bad if you need to start over several times. Finding the right outline to follow is the hardest part. But once you get past that point, all that’s left is the rather simple matter of filling in the blanks.