

SATURATION BIBLE STUDY

APPENDIX SEVEN

100+ Questions to Help You Observe

*Read the scripture,
not only as history,
but as a love letter from God.*

Thomas Watson

*For some years now, I have read through the Bible twice every
year. If you picture the Bible to be a mighty tree and every word
a little branch, I have shaken every one of these branches
because I wanted to know what it was and what it meant.*

Martin Luther

I've found that a list of questions is helpful while observing a text. While not all of these questions will pertain to every passage you study, they are a good reference tool in your "Bible study toolbox" to help you wrestle with a passage and see things you may typically overlook.

Most of these are starter questions... a good follow-up question is: "so what?" or "why?" Remember that insight often comes when you ask the question behind the question, so keep asking questions.

OVERVIEW (BIG PICTURE) QUESTIONS

- Who is the author? How does that help me understand the book/passage?
- Who is the author writing to? What can I discover about them?
- Who are the characters in the book/passage?
- What is the purpose of the book I'm studying, and how does that give insight into this particular passage?
- When and where was the book written?
- When did this book, event, or passage happen in relation to other events?
- What is the main context? (*i.e.*, *What is happening before and after the passage?*)
- What genre is this? (*e.g.*, *biography, prophecy, narrative, parable, poetry, proverb, exposition/epistles, etc.*)

THE CLASSIC JOURNALIST QUESTIONS

- Who?
- What?
- When?
- Where?
- Why?
- How?

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND QUESTIONS

- What time period in history are we dealing with?
- What is happening around the world at this time?
- What's happening at a regional or local level?
- What's happening historically at the location where this passage takes place?
- Has anything happened in the past (especially in the Old Testament) that gives insight into the passage?
- Is there any other historical background that would be helpful to know?

CULTURAL BACKGROUND QUESTIONS

- Is the context of this passage Jewish, Roman, Egyptian, Babylonian, or??
- How does that context impact the passage and its implications?
- Are there any cultural clues given in the passage?
- Are there any cultural values that influence the understanding of the passage? (e.g., honor/shame, patriarchal, communal/individual)
- What assumptions do I have from my own cultural lens that I may be enforcing upon the passage to mean something different than the original culture?
- Is there any other cultural background information that would be helpful to know?

OLD TESTAMENT QUESTIONS

- If studying Hebrew poetry, is parallelism being used? (*where one word or phrase is said differently, but either means the same thing or is used to establish a contrast*)
- Is there a chiasm in the text? (*where there is a parallel in phrases or thoughts leading inward to a central point*)
- How does this Old Testament passage reveal (or point to/foreshadow) Jesus Christ?
- How does the passage/concept find its fulfillment in the New Testament?

NEW TESTAMENT QUESTIONS

- Does this New Testament passage or verse show up in Old Testament? If so, how does the original context give insight into the New Testament passage?
- Can this New Testament passage be illustrated from the Old Testament? If so, how?

PARABLE QUESTIONS

- If you are studying a parable in the New Testament, here are some questions to consider.
- What is the occasion (context) for the parable—who was the parable spoken to, why was it told, and what prompted its telling?
- Is there a clear explanation of the parable? (*Jesus often explained His parables to the disciples*)
- What is the central focus or idea of the parable? (*Note: parables have one central focus/theme*)
- What are the relevant and irrelevant details? (*Not all details matter in a parable. Because there is one central focus, you must identify what details contribute to the main theme and which ones are merely added for the sake of the story*)
- How does cultural and historical context help interpret the parable? (*A Bible dictionary or a book on Bible times and customs can be helpful as many of the parables are related to things outside our normal context—e.g., the parable of the different agriculture soils, the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, etc.*)

GEOGRAPHY QUESTIONS

- Is there a location mentioned? If so, look it up on a Bible map.
- What kind of place is it (desert, mountain, valley, near the coast, urban, rural, etc.)?
- Has anything happened previously at this location that informs the passage I'm examining?
- Who lives in and around this location? What do we know about them?
- Who's the ruling authority at this location? (*e.g., Pharaoh, Caesar, a king, the Sanhedrin, etc.*)
- What does the name of the location mean? Does the meaning have any significance to or wordplay in the passage?

WORD QUESTIONS

- What is the meaning of this word in its original language?
- How can I properly understand this word in light of its context?
- Do other translations use a different word or phrase? If so, why? (*e.g., Philippians 2:5 – “let this mind/attitude/lifestyle be in you”*)
- Does the original language give any pictures or illustrations that help me understand the word better? (*e.g., the Greek word baptizō – baptism – gives the picture of a cucumber being immersed in the vinegar solution and turning into a pickle*)
- How is this word used elsewhere in the book? In the writings by the same author? In the entire Bible?

SENTENCE QUESTIONS

- Are there any words I don't know and need to look up the definitions for?
- What are the keywords in this sentence? Should I do a word study on them?
- Is there any repetition of words, phrases, or concepts? (*repetition often shows importance or emphasis—e.g., God is holy, holy, holy*)
- Is there a contrast? (*things that are different*)
- Is there a comparison? (*things that are alike*)
- Is there a list given?
- Is there a cause and effect? (*Note: sometimes the effect is given before the cause*)
- Is there a conjunction? (*e.g., and, but, for, therefore, since, because ...*)
- What is the main verb?
- Who is the subject of the sentence?
- If there are pronouns, who do they refer to? (*e.g., he, she, them, they, you, me, etc.*)
- Is there any indication of time? (*i.e., when something happened*)
- Are there any figures of speech or idioms?
 - ▶ Simile: comparing two different things with a connecting word (*often with "like, as, such as" or with the phrase "as ... so"—e.g., Psalm 42:1*)
 - ▶ Metaphor: an implied comparison (*e.g., John 15:5*)
 - ▶ Exaggeration (hyperbole): a purposeful exaggeration to emphasize something (*e.g., Matthew 23:24*)
 - ▶ Metonymy: using the name of one object or concept to refer to another (*e.g., Mark 1:5—"country" refers to the people not the location*)
 - ▶ Synecdoche: where the whole refers to the parts or the parts refer to the whole (*e.g., "the law" in the Old Testament can refer to the Ten Commandments, the Pentateuch [the first five books, the books of Moses], or the entire Old Testament*)
 - ▶ Personification: an object is given the characteristics or attributes of a person (*e.g., Isaiah 55:12*)
 - ▶ Irony: saying something opposite of what you mean (*e.g., 1 Corinthians 4:8*)
 - ▶ Idioms: an expression that means something different than the individual words mean in the expression
 - *English Examples: it's raining cats and dogs, he's in a jam, underdog ...*
 - *Bible Examples: lamp unto my feet, harden your hearts, white-washed tombs, a double-edged sword ...*

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS

- What are the keywords in this paragraph? Should I do a word study on them?
- Is there any repetition of words, phrases, or concepts? (*repetition often shows importance or emphasis—e.g., “In Christ” shows up 30 times throughout Ephesians 1–3*)
- Is something stated generally or specifically? (*e.g., general: “I like desserts” ... specific: “I like chocolate cake”*)
- Are there questions asked ... or answers given? (*Note: sometimes you have a question without an answer, an answer with a presumed question, or both a question and its answer*)
- Is there dialogue? If so, who is speaking? Who are they speaking to?
- Is there a purpose statement given? (*e.g., John 20:31*)
- Is there a summary statement of a passage (*e.g., “so that” or “for this reason”*)
- What is the means by which something is accomplished? (*e.g., “in the power of the Spirit”*)
- Are there actions or roles of God or other people mentioned?
- Are there any emotional terms?
- What is the tone of the passage? (*e.g., affectionate, chiding, disciplinary, instructive, reproof, correcting*)
- Is there a sequence of events? (*this happened, then this happened*)
- Are there any symbols in the passage? (*a picture that represents something else—e.g., John 10:7*)

GRAMMAR QUESTIONS

- What can the grammar of the passage tell us? (*i.e., examine each word and its contribution to the whole—nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, direct objects, etc.*)
- Should I diagram this passage? (*remember 6th-grade sentence diagramming? Sometimes this can reveal how a passage breaks into its pieces*)

OTHER GREAT QUESTIONS AND THINGS TO LOOK FOR

- Is the passage prescriptive or descriptive? (*i.e., prescriptive: tells you what to do, a command | descriptive: tells what someone else did, narrative, story*)
- Is there a logical order or progression in the passage?
- What do we learn about God’s character and nature?
- What do we learn about people? (*e.g., character, nature, attitude, behavior, etc.*)
- What do we learn about how to relate with God and/or others?
- How would you describe the before and after of an event or encounter?
- How long did something take?
- Look for keywords
- Look for commands
- Look for warnings
- Look for comparisons (things that are alike)

- Look for contrasts (*things that are different*)
- Look for illustrations
- Look for causes and effects and reasons for doing things
- Look for promises and their conditions for fulfillment
- Look for progression from the general to the specific
- Look for progression from the specific to the general
- Look for steps of progression in a narrative or biography
- Look for results
- Look for advice, admonitions, and attitudes
- Look for connectives, articles, and prepositions
- Look for explanations
- Look for Old Testament quotes in the New Testament
- Look for paradoxes
- Look for emphasis through the use of space (*proportion*)
- Look for planned exaggerations or hyperboles
- Look for the use of the current events of the times
- Look for the force of the verbs
- Look for anything unusual or unexpected
- Look for anything that is emphasized
- Look for things that are related
- Look for things that are alike or unlike each other
- Look for things true to life