

## Working with a Paragraph

In working with observation, we want to focus on paragraphs. The paragraph is the basic unit of study - not the verse, not the chapter. We know that a paragraph may be as short as one verse or as long as an entire chapter, but in any case, the paragraph represents one complete thought. It is a group of related sentences and statements that deal with one main topic or idea. That makes it ideal for observational study.

By the way, the original Scriptures were not divided into chapters, paragraphs, and verses. They were just scrolls and similar documents with long, unbroken passages. Twelve hundred years after Christ, scholars began carving them up into the divisions we have today to enhance Bible study. So sometimes we have to *ignore* them in order to read the books properly.

When looking at paragraphs we want to:

- Check the context by looking at the significance of words
- Ask are the words connectives?
- What do we find there?
- What do the words or items refer to?
- Label our observations to help us get a handle on the material
- Remember that no detail is unimportant, we are assuming the role of a biblical detective

Now that we've discovered that we've got to learn to read, read scripture better, and read as for the first time, we've also got to learn what to look for. Listed below are 3 of the 6 clues to help us further unlock biblical text while in observation.

### **Things that are emphasized**

- The Spirit of God uses a number of tools to emphasize ideas, events, people, and other material in scripture.
  - Amount of space - a book can emphasize something by devoting a large portion of space to it.
    - Genesis
      - It has fifty chapters
        - The first eleven cover the creation, the Fall, the Flood, the Tower of Babel, and others details. All of those major events are compressed into just eleven chapters.
        - By contrast, the writer devotes chapters 12-50 to lives of four individuals: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.
      - Through this emphasis, the Spirit of God is teaching us that the *most important thing in the book* is the family that God chose to be His people.

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- Stated purpose - Another way biblical writers may emphasize their points is by telling us straight out what they are up to.
  - Solomon in Proverbs launches a collection of wisdom sayings by telling the reader up front why he ought to read the book.
    - For instance, to know wisdom and instruction.
- Order - A third way to emphasize something is to give it a strategic placement in the material.
  - This comes before that; or this follows that.
  - For instance, in Genesis 2, God places Adam and Eve in the garden “to cultivate it and keep it,” the text says. Then in chapter 3 the couple sin, and God drives them out of the Garden and curses the earth.
  - That order becomes important when we talk about a person’s work, because some people believe that work is a part of the curse but the order of events in Genesis disallows that interpretation.
- Movement from the lesser to the greater, and vice versa - Often a writer will build up to a climax where he presents some key information.

### Things that are repeated

- Repetition reinforces
  - Terms, phrases, and clauses - Scripture constantly repeats terms, phrases, and clauses to emphasize their importance.
    - Psalm 136
  - Characters - Sometimes a character reappears.
  - Incidents and circumstances - Sometimes a writer makes his point by repeating a particular incident or set of circumstances.
  - Patterns - A related situation is the creation of a repeating pattern
  - New Testament use of Old Testament passages - A final and obvious case of repetition is the citation of Old Testament Scripture by the New.
    - If the Spirit of God compels a New Testament writer to recall a passage from the Old Testament, it’s like because He wants to emphasize a portion of God’s Word.
- In short, whenever you study the Bible and notice that something is repeated-said more than once-mark it down. It’s the writer’s way of pointing out matters of crucial importance.

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### Things that are related

- Things that have some connection or interaction with each other.
- Just because two things are next to each other doesn't make them related. They've got to work off of each other in some way.
  - Movement from the general to the specific - This is the relationship between the whole and its parts, between a category and its individual members, between the big picture and the details.
    - For example, Genesis 1:1 gives you an overview: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." If the account ended there, you wouldn't have any of the details on how God created the heavens and the earth, you would just know that He did. But the rest of the chapter fills the specifics.
    - Whenever you come across a broad, general statement in Scripture, look to see whether the writer follows with specific details that flesh it out in some way.
  - Questions and answers
    - The question is one of the most powerful tools of communication. If I ask you a question, doesn't it more or less force you to think? Sure it does.
    - If someone only asks questions and never provides answers, that can be very frustrating. You begin to wonder whether he knows what he's talking about, but we're going to discover that the biblical writers employ both strategic questions and helpful answers.
      - Example Romans 6:1.
    - Questions and answers demand your attention.
  - Cause and effect
    - This is the principle of the billiard balls. You strike the cue ball with your cue (that's the cause) in order to knock the colored balls into the pockets (that's the effect).
    - In Scripture we find all kinds of cause-effect relationships ricocheting around the text.
      - For instance, Psalm 1 says that the person who plants himself in the counsel of God's Word will flourish like a well-watered tree. Notice, that's a direct cause link between Scripture and God's blessing.