

1. Observation

The Observation stage of inductive Bible study involves reading the text closely and making sure you understand the basic details of the passage. In Observation you ask the basic questions of who, what, when, where, why, and how. It's very important to engage the text directly yourself before you look at study guides or other helps like study Bibles or commentaries. Asking questions of the text yourself will help you navigate through the interpretive options provided by other resources. It's also important for you to read your passage in full before you start looking carefully into the details.

1.1 Read the Passage Multiple Times

Read your passage several times in your preferred Bible. As you read, use the Highlighting Tool to mark important words, key ideas, and noteworthy people, places, or events. Highlighting can help you note key aspects of the passage and reinforce your familiarity.

Ephesians 2:1–5 (ESV) — **1** And you were dead in the trespasses and sins **2** in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— **3** among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. **4** But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, **5** even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ... [More »](#)

What questions or insights do you have about this passage? Take note of anything in the text that is confusing, surprising, challenging, or hard to understand. Record your questions here and keep them in mind as you explore your passage further.

1.2 Read the Passage in Multiple Versions

Reading your passage in multiple versions such as a Hebrew or Greek edition or a variety of English translations can improve your understanding of the passage. Using translations that take different approaches may draw your attention to problems in interpretation. As you read, be sure to notice things that sound strange, or that seem confusing. You will want to remember these things for later study.

Compare Bible versions

Consider what you have read. Are there things that you don't understand? List them here and make sure to keep them in mind as you examine the passage more deeply.

What else do you notice in this passage?

1.3 Establish the Boundaries of the Passage

Determine the outer boundaries of the passage you are studying. Sometimes different Bibles establish the boundaries of a passage differently. These passages are often called "pericopes" (a word that simply means a selection of text from a larger work).

Are the boundaries of the pericope that contains the passage generally agreed upon? If not, what appears to be the cause of the differences?

1.4 Identify People

Review your passage and note references to people (such as explicit references, descriptions, or pronouns). Identify whether the people noted are major players involved in the action of the passage or whether they are noted for background information or symbolic reference.

Biblical People: Ephesians 2:1–10

Who are the main players in your passage? What makes them important to the passage?

1.5 Identify Things and Objects

Using the Biblical Things data, identify the types of things and specific objects mentioned in your passage.

Biblical Things: Ephesians 2:1–10

Record your observations about the objects, and note other events and passages that involve these same things. How does that knowledge affect your understanding of this passage?

1.6 Identify Important Words

Each passage has certain key words or ideas that are central to the meaning of the passage. Identifying and examining these key terms and concepts is essential to understanding the passage properly. Taking different positions on the meaning of a passage's key terms is often how significantly different interpretations arise.

Important Words: Ephesians 2:1–10

Identify words that appear to be contextually important and explain what is significant about those words.

2. Interpretation

The Interpretation stage of Bible study involves sorting through what a text meant to its original audience. You will use Bible reference tools like study guides, Bible dictionaries, study Bibles, or commentaries to learn what you can about what the text could have meant in its original context.

2.1 Examine the Context of the Book

The key historical context for the passage that you're studying is the location of the book in which the passage appears. Who's the author? When was it written? Who are the recipients? What was the purpose of the writing? These core questions orient us to the broader historical context before we talk about the particulars of what's happening in a given passage.

Record the basic facts that you've learned about the book's context: author, date, audience, and purpose.

2.2 Evaluate the Type of Literature of Your Passage

There are a number of distinct styles of literature found in the Bible. These different styles or types are commonly referred to as *genres*, but we also sometimes label them as *literary types*. You are probably familiar with common genres still used today like poems, letters, or novels. Identifying and understanding the literary style or genre of a passage is important for interpreting it correctly. Your expectations about a text's meaning are heavily influenced by what genre you think you are reading. You would not expect the same things when reading a repair manual as when reading a novel. Or you would not read a poem the same way as you would read a news story. If a particular literary genre occurs in your passage, it should be identified and carefully evaluated.

Literary Typing: Ephesians 2:1–10

What are the literary types identified in this passage? Do the indicated types fit your expectation of what sort of text you are reading? Why or why not?

Does the passage have any shifts in type or genre? What significance might those shifts have for the meaning of the passage?

2.3 Examine the Cultural Context

Cultural background information is essential for understanding the passage's possible meaning for the biblical audience.

Cultural Concepts: Ephesians 2:1–10

Are there any instances of cultural concepts or practices in the passage? Does knowledge of any of these affect understanding of the passage?

2.4 Examine the Historical Context

What are the main events in world history that are relevant to your passage? Do those events connect to the Bible and provide any helpful knowledge to inform your understanding of the passage?

2.5 Identify Biblical Cross-References

Taking careful consideration of the relationship between your passage and a related passage can help you reach a better understanding of both passages.

Important Passages: Ephesians 2:1–10

Review each key cross-reference and consider its relevance to your passage. Why is the cross-reference relevant for your passage?

Which cross-references are most important for your passage? What additional insight do the related passages provide for your understanding of your passage?

2.6 Research Important Words

Review the list of important words identified earlier for your passage and consider whether you want to research any in more depth.

Important Words: Ephesians 2:1–10

Select one or two words from the list to study in more depth. What word or words did you choose? How did examining the words influence your understanding of the passage?

2.7 Evaluate Discussions of Important Words in Commentaries

Commentaries often discuss key terms or important words in the context of the passage they occur in. These discussions are valuable because they are contextually appropriate and focused on the current passage.

Lemma in Passage: Ephesians 2:1–10

For words you have identified as important, evaluate commentary entries to learn more about the word's use in context.

2.8 Examine Commentary Discussions

Locate commentaries that discuss your passage and review the discussion to better understand which aspects of your passage are most challenging or unclear. A commentary discussion may alert you that something you thought was clear in the text is actually a complicated and debated issue.

Commentaries: Ephesians 2:1–10

Record insights gained from reading the commentaries. Note especially the parts of your passage that inspired the most discussion in the commentaries.

Have the consulted commentaries modified your understanding of the passage? In what way?

2.9 Summarize Your Passage

Review what you have studied and summarize it. Writing a brief summary of your passage and what you've learned about it will strengthen your understanding of the passage and help you remember the main points from your study.

In 25 words or less, summarize the main points you have learned about this passage.

3. Application

The Application stage of Bible study asks, "So what?" Any doctrine we learn from a passage should be formative for us. The focus of application is who we are to be and what we are to do. In some cases that's individual; in some cases that's corporate. But it's the shaping of character, and not just the mind, that should be the result of Bible study.

3.1 Determine the Passage's Theological Principles

An essential part of application is determining what timeless principles are taught in a passage. The meaning of a passage will be applied differently at different times and in different places, but the underlying truths of Scripture will be applicable in some way at all times and places. Before we can apply a passage, we must understand its theological principles.

Thematic Outlines: Ephesians 2:1–10

What theological principles are communicated in your passage?

Which theological principles from your passage are most important? How might they be applied today?

3.2 Establish the Primary Application of your Passage

Now that you have reviewed your understanding of the passage, you are in a better position to determine the passage's primary application.

How has this passage challenged or moved you?

What issues, personal or corporate, are involved with this passage?

What spiritual struggles are addressed in this passage, either directly or indirectly?

What response do you think the passage should inspire in others if you shared it and your insights with them?

What is the primary application of your passage?

3.3 Share Your Insights with Others

What have you learned that you should share with others? Your insight could be valuable to others; sharing about it may encourage and enlighten your friends. Don't forget to include what steps you might plan to take in response to what you've learned. The ultimate goal of our learning and study of the Scriptures should be a changed life, not merely acquiring more information.