

How to Study the Bible 6: Observation - Paragraph

Introduction:

- In this session, we will practice observation, on a larger portion of Scripture: A PARAGRAPH.
- This is the step where we ask the question: What do I see?
- The paragraph we are going to study is the prayer of Nehemiah.

Nehemiah 1.4–11 As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven. 5 And I said, “O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, 6 let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father’s house have sinned. 7 We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses. 8 Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples, 9 but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.’ 10 They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand. 11 O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.”

A. Observe the Context

v. 4 As soon as I heard these words

- What is the purpose of the words “As soon as”?
- What words did Nehemiah hear?
- Go back to the beginning of the book:

v. 1 The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. Now it happened in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the citadel,

- **What clues about the author of this book does v. 1 give us?**
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
- **What other clues in verse 1 do you notice?**
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
- **What do the first two phrases refer to?**
- **This answers the question: _____?**
- **But he's writing in the twentieth year of what?**
- **Read the entire book of the Bible before you begin careful observation of a verse or paragraph.**
- **What does the phrase, "I was in Susa the citadel (capitol)" tell you?**
- **This answers the question: _____?**
- **Why is Nehemiah serving the king of Persia?**
- **THEN something happens:**

v. 2 that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem

- **What does Hanani do?**
- **What does Nehemiah do?**
- **What two things does he ask?**
 - 1.
 - 2.
- **Then Hanani answers:**

v. 3 And they said to me, "The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire."

- What three things does he tell Nehemiah?
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.

- What four things does Nehemiah do in verse 4?
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.

B. Label your Observations

- Summarize what you see with simple words:

1. _____ vv. 1-3

2. _____ v. 4

3. _____ vv. 5-11

3.1. _____ v. 5

v. 5 And I said, "O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments,

3.2. _____ vv. 6-7

vv. 6–7 let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned. 7 We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses.

- Did you notice that Nehemiah's focus on sin came immediately after his focus on God?

3.3. _____ vv. 8-11

vv. 8–11 Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples, 9 but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the

uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.' 10 They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand. 11 O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man."

- **What are the three requests Nehemiah makes?**

1. Remember your _____

- Always pray on the basis of the promises of God!

2. Give _____

- What does he need God to make him successful at?

3. Grant _____

- What does he need mercy for?

C. No Detail is Too Small

- Is that the end of the paragraph?

v. 11 Now I was cupbearer to the king.

- What was a cupbearer?
- The Holy Spirit inspired this little detail about Nehemiah to tell us _____ God accomplished His plan.

Conclusion:

- There are many more observations you could make about this paragraph, and many more things to discover.
- Continue to practice the skill of asking questions about a text of Scripture. This is the only way you will be able to learn what it is truly about.