

**LEADERS**



# Observation - Interpretation - **Application**

COMMUNITY GROUP LEADERS MEETING

Carl M. Follingstad, PhD.

# From Heaven on Earth – The Word (J. Abaroa)

## PRELIMINARIES

- Bible is not read because it is thought to be too complicated, too old & irrelevant, and we are selfish.
- Bible is Inspired, Inerrant, Infallible, & Alive!
- How to Understand the Bible: Commit, Meditate, Live, Share

# “Protecting” the Text’s Meaning & Intent



## Observation

*What does the passage say?*

After reading the passage, look back and observe what the passage is saying. Try to look for repeated words, key phrases, and cross-references. Also, think about questions that you have after reading. Allow your curiosity to lead you further in understanding.

---

*Who? What? When? Where? Why?*

---

*What other questions arise from the passage?*



## Interpretation

*What does the passage mean?*

After observing what was said in the text, interpretation seeks to understand what God, or the book’s author, is seeking to communicate through the passage. Context is crucial to determining the meaning of the text. Outside resources like Bible dictionaries and commentaries also help when seeking historical context for passages.

---

*What is the context?*

---

*Why is the author bringing this up?*

---

*What is God saying through this passage?*



## Application

*How do I need to respond?*

It’s easy to breeze through passages, especially those familiar to us, without taking time to stop and think about how we can practically apply the truths we studied.

---

*How should I live my life in light of this passage?*

---

*How does this truth compel me to be transformed?*

---

*What does it look like to put this into practice?*

<sup>23</sup> He went up from there to Bethel, and while he was going up on the way, some small boys came out of the city and jeered at him, saying, “Go up, you baldhead! Go up, you baldhead!” <sup>24</sup> And he turned around, and when he saw them, he cursed them in the name of the LORD. And two she-bears came out of the woods and tore forty-two of the boys <sup>25</sup> From there he went on to Mount Carmel, and from there he returned to Samaria.

2 KINGS 2:23-25 NRSV

**[Interpretation]** Because the verb “he went up” is in the singular, Elisha was alone and not escorted by anyone else from Jericho. Had they walked with him, as they should have, the youths would not have dared malign the prophet, and they would not have been devoured by the bears.

**[Application (General)]** This teaches that those who fail to escort travelers and travelers who refuse to let anyone accompany them can be held responsible for bloodshed.

*(Talmud at location).*



## Observation

*What does the passage say?*

After reading the passage, look back and observe what the passage is saying. Try to look for repeated words, key phrases, and cross-references. Also, think about questions that you have after reading. Allow your curiosity to lead you further in understanding.

---

*Who? What? When? Where? Why?*

---

*What other questions arise from the passage?*

**Key Biblical terms (grace, forgiveness, atonement), other themes, unknown concepts/customs?**



## Observation

*What does the passage say?*

After reading the passage, look back and observe what the passage is saying. Try to look for repeated words, key phrases, and cross-references. Also, think about questions that you have after reading. Allow your curiosity to lead you further in understanding.

---

*Who? What? When? Where? Why?*

---

*What other questions arise from the passage?*

**Was Elijah taking revenge for a trivial offense which is beneath the dignity of a prophet of God? Is he being a mean-spirited prophet needlessly punishing teasing children?**

- What feelings, reactions, and associations does the text call forth in me? (For example: innate/foreign; my text/not my text; inviting/repulsive; happy/sad; illuminating/vague)
- What does the text say to me that is new, and in which life situation does it address me?
- What is important to me thematically, and in view of the statements of the text, to what do I not relate?
- What do I recognize as familiar?
- What stands out to me?
- What do I miss?
- What do I not understand?
- What disturbs me, or stimulates disagreement? (For example, as a “learned” Christian, as a woman, as a man, as a democratic person to whom absolute royal power is a thing of the past, as a person who wants to find himself/herself, as an engaged citizen who intercedes on behalf of universal human rights, and who takes offence at the “cruelty” of the Old Testament.)
- What dawns on me regarding specific statements?
- What do I think about when reading? Given the desire to understand, what do I draw upon for comparison?
- To which people, in which life situation, could I show the text as an enriching, illuminating word of God?



## Observation

*What does the passage say?*

After reading the passage, look back and observe what the passage is saying. Try to look for repeated words, key phrases, and cross-references. Also, think about questions that you have after reading. Allow your curiosity to lead you further in understanding.

---

*Who? What? When? Where? Why?*

---

*What other questions arise from the passage?*

**Observation & Interpretation often go together back and forth here while looking at these details. Not just looking at details, but details plus possible significance (“fast track”).**

- **He** is Elisha, **Mount Carmel** & **Samaria** (both in northern Israel).
- **Bethel** one of the two cities Jereboam I set up in kingdom of Israel as rival center of worship to Jerusalem (Judah), used two golden calf idols, apostasy from true faith. Other young prophets (“company”) of the Lord lived there [2:3]).
- **“Small boys”**: More than 42, probably teenagers+ [na’ariim katiniim] so physical threat, possible counterparts to young prophets of the Lord in Bethel.
- **“Go up”** was a taunt for Elisha to imitate his predecessor’s (Elijah) ascent to heaven.
- **“baldhead”** was another insult comparing him unfavorably to “hairy” Elijah (1:8). Both show mocking of God’s chosen successor to the true faith.



## Observation

*What does the passage say?*

After reading the passage, look back and observe what the passage is saying. Try to look for repeated words, key phrases, and cross-references. Also, think about questions that you have after reading. Allow your curiosity to lead you further in understanding.

---

*Who? What? When? Where? Why?*

---

*What other questions arise from the passage?*

**Observation & Interpretation often go together back and forth here while looking at these details. Not just looking at details, but details plus possible significance (“fast track”).**

- **“cursed in the name of Yahweh”**, Elisha places the decision for judgement in God’s hands, curse would not take effect unless deserved, not personal revenge. Reminiscent of God’s curses on Jeroboam, Ahab, and other kings for apostasy.
- **“two bears tore 42 of the lads”** of the judgements for breaking the covenant in Leviticus 26:22, “I will let loose wild animals against you and they shall bereave you of your children.”
- **“42 lads”**: same number as Jehu kills of Amaziah’s relatives in 2K 10:14, judgement on both religious and government apostasy. [Rabbis: “42” is the number of one of God’s names!].



# Application

*How do I need to respond?*

It's easy to breeze through passages, especially those familiar to us, without taking time to stop and think about how we can practically apply the truths we studied.

---

*How should I live my life in light of this passage?*

---

*How does this truth compel me to be transformed?*

---

*What does it look like to put this into practice?*



# Application

*How do I need to respond?*

It's easy to breeze through passages, especially those familiar to us, without taking time to stop and think about how we can practically apply the truths we studied.

---

*How should I live my life in light of this passage?*

---

*How does this truth compel me to be transformed?*

---

*What does it look like to put this into practice?*

## **Application is NOT (or not ONLY)**

*Information, Concepts, Relevance, Illustrations*

## **Application Asks “So What and Now What”?**

*Why should I know these facts?*

*How can I use this information?*

*What am I going to do about what I have just learned?*

## **Application Steps**

*Receive the Message*

*Reflect on your life*

*Identify what you need to change*

*Make a plan to make that change*

*[Veerman 1993:20]*



## Application

*How do I need to respond?*

It's easy to breeze through passages, especially those familiar to us, without taking time to stop and think about how we can practically apply the truths we studied.

---

*How should I live my life in light of this passage?*

---

*How does this truth compel me to be transformed?*

---

*What does it look like to put this into practice?*

## 1. Recognize the “Text Action” — What is the Text Doing?

- Describing
  - Rules/Commands: Require definite actions but actions sometimes unfamiliar in new contexts. What are the objections and fears to following the rule?
  - Ideals (Character): Ideals/Principles are fleshed out by a wide range of behavior without specific actions: “Seek First...” What does this look like in new situations?

*[Based on Doriani 2001:96]*



## Application

*How do I need to respond?*

It's easy to breeze through passages, especially those familiar to us, without taking time to stop and think about how we can practically apply the truths we studied.

---

*How should I live my life in light of this passage?*

---

*How does this truth compel me to be transformed?*

---

*What does it look like to put this into practice?*

## 1. Recognize the “Text Action” – What is the Text Doing?

- Describing
  - Doctrine: State truths of faith & belief, explain things from God's point of view. God's promises are doctrine: God promises this so He commits and is like that. How would I behave if I believed this? Why would this doctrine be rejected and by whom?
  - Procedures: Construction of Ark, Tabernacle, Temple. Why is this procedure even here and why is it important? What does it say about God/Man that it is important?

*[Based on Doriani 2001:96]*



## Application

*How do I need to respond?*

It's easy to breeze through passages, especially those familiar to us, without taking time to stop and think about how we can practically apply the truths we studied.

---

*How should I live my life in light of this passage?*

---

*How does this truth compel me to be transformed?*

---

*What does it look like to put this into practice?*

## 1. Recognize the “Text Action” — What is the Text Doing?

- Storying

- God's & Other's Actions and Responses with respect to Covenant Relationship and otherwise. (e.g., Wicked acts are ALSO rebellious acts). Stories demonstrate/show moral lessons and the matter at hand more powerfully.
- What is the principle(s) the story is trying to show?

*[Based on Doriani 2001:96]*



## Application

*How do I need to respond?*

It's easy to breeze through passages, especially those familiar to us, without taking time to stop and think about how we can practically apply the truths we studied.

---

*How should I live my life in light of this passage?*

---

*How does this truth compel me to be transformed?*

---

*What does it look like to put this into practice?*

## 1. Recognize the “Text Action” — What is the Text Doing?

- Expressing/“Emoting”
  - *Direct line of communication with God, expressing ourselves directly (praying, praising, lamenting, asking forgiveness), Emotions expressed show the things we value and circumstances going through.*
  - *Expressive texts also MODELS for how to Express (holy) emotion (cf Luther: “The Psalms teach us to open the heart and pour out what lies at the bottom of it”) More frequent use of images/symbols.*

*[Based on Doriani 2001:96]*



## Application

*How do I need to respond?*

It's easy to breeze through passages, especially those familiar to us, without taking time to stop and think about how we can practically apply the truths we studied.

---

*How should I live my life in light of this passage?*

---

*How does this truth compel me to be transformed?*

---

*What does it look like to put this into practice?*

## 2. Run through the Observation Details with “Now” Questions

- People: How are these people like people in the world? How are they like me?
- Setting: What are the similarities in this setting/situation to the present time?

[based on Veerman 1993:61]



## Application

*How do I need to respond?*

It's easy to breeze through passages, especially those familiar to us, without taking time to stop and think about how we can practically apply the truths we studied.

---

*How should I live my life in light of this passage?*

---

*How does this truth compel me to be transformed?*

---

*What does it look like to put this into practice?*

## 2. Run through the Observation Details with “Now” Questions

- Action: What would a modern person have done/not done in the situation? What would I have done? How is the situation similar to mine?
- Original Application: (from Interpretation): What was the intended meaning for original audience? What did they learn? What did God want them to do? What was God's solution to the problem?

[based on Veerman 1993:61]



## Application

*How do I need to respond?*

It's easy to breeze through passages, especially those familiar to us, without taking time to stop and think about how we can practically apply the truths we studied.

---

*How should I live my life in light of this passage?*

---

*How does this truth compel me to be transformed?*

---

*What does it look like to put this into practice?*

### 3. Find the Meta-Principle behind the Text applicable to now (General)

- What is the underlying Principle for the original Point?
- What is the message for all mankind about God/Man?
- What are the timeless truths / moral of the story?

[based on Veerman 1993:45]



## Application

*How do I need to respond?*

It's easy to breeze through passages, especially those familiar to us, without taking time to stop and think about how we can practically apply the truths we studied.

---

*How should I live my life in light of this passage?*

---

*How does this truth compel me to be transformed?*

---

*What does it look like to put this into practice?*

### 3. Find the Meta-Principle behind the Text applicable to now (General)

- Original Meaning and Meta-Principle are the same (Matt 5: "cut off your hand" = make painful sacrifices to avoid sin.)
- Meta-Principle is Related to New Context (1 Cor 8:13 avoid eating meat offered to idols -> avoid doing something harming tender faith of new believers (e.g., -> alcohol).
- Meta-Principle is Indirect: = Learning principles of evangelism from Jesus' sending of 12/70 disciples on their mission trips. Most story principles.

[based on Veerman 1993:45]



## Application

*How do I need to respond?*

It's easy to breeze through passages, especially those familiar to us, without taking time to stop and think about how we can practically apply the truths we studied.

---

*How should I live my life in light of this passage?*

---

*How does this truth compel me to be transformed?*

---

*What does it look like to put this into practice?*

## 4. Find the Contexts this Meta-Principle can be Applied to

- Relationships (marriage, family, roommates, etc)
- Conflicts
- Personal Burdens
- Difficult Situations
- Character Weaknesses
- Lack of Resources
- Responsibilities
- Opportunities

[based on Veerman 1993:129]



## Application

*How do I need to respond?*

It's easy to breeze through passages, especially those familiar to us, without taking time to stop and think about how we can practically apply the truths we studied.

---

*How should I live my life in light of this passage?*

---

*How does this truth compel me to be transformed?*

---

*What does it look like to put this into practice?*

## 5. Ask how the Meta-Principle behind the Text is applicable to me?

- Where are my areas of need, conviction, and opportunity?
- Where in my life might this truth possibly apply?

[based on Veerman 1993:52-61]

# Application Procedure

1. Recognize the “Text Action”—What is the Text Doing?
2. Run through the Observation Details with Now Questions
3. Find the Meta-Principle behind the Text applicable to Now  
(General)
4. Find the Contexts that this Meta-Principle can be applied to
5. Ask how the Meta-Principle behind the Text is applicable to me?

[Based on *How to Apply the Bible*, Dave R Veerman 1993; *Putting the Truth to Work* Daniel M. Doriani 2001]

# “Digging Deeper” Resources

- *Dictionary of New Testament Background*
- *The New Testament in Its World (NT. Wright & Bird) 2019 Zondervan.*
- *New Bible Dictionary*
- *IVP Bible Background Commentary (NT & OT)*
- *NET Bible 1<sup>st</sup> Edition Notes*
- *NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible, ed. D.A. Carson*
- *New Studies in Biblical Theology, series ed. D.A. Carson, Apollos series\*, e.g., Five Festal Garments (#10), Barry Webb 2000.*
- *A User’s Guide to Bible Translations, Dewey (IVP)*
- *How to Read a Book : The Classic Guide to Intelligent Reading Adler & Van Doren (1972), Simon & Schuster.*
- *Logos Bible Software*