

The Letter of James 1:1 – 8

English Standard Version (ESV)

Observation Example

Observation means finding the facts of the passage. What does the writer actually say? Thorough, accurate observation helps avoid misunderstanding or reading our ideas into the passage.

This example shows some of the possible detailed examination of these four verses. Before starting this kind of observation, be sure to read the passage through first, maybe several times. Get the sense of the passage as a whole before looking for the details.

Keep in mind the three phases of inductive study:

- Observation – What does it **say**?
- Interpretation – What does it **mean**?
- Application – What does it mean **for me**?

Observation often leads naturally into questions of interpretation. However, it is important to spend considerable time in observation, collecting facts about the passage before moving to interpretation. It can be helpful to jot down preliminary questions that the facts in the passage bring to mind, but don't get sidetracked from observation trying to answer the questions too early. Sometimes continued observation will shed light on the question from the beginning of the process.

These examples are not exhaustive or unique. When going through the passage again, the observations might be similar, but the preliminary questions might be very different as new dimensions of the text draw our attention.

For more [suggestions](#) and [examples](#) of inductive Bible study, go to a series of podcasts on the topic:

- [Pastor Bob Exposed](#) – for his training on the importance of intentional Bible Study.
- [Jesus Wants You Rich](#) – from studying His Word.
- [Crime Scene](#) – looking for facts in Scripture just like a detective looks for clues.
- [Eyes Wide Shut](#) – samples of more detailed Observation in inductive Bible study.

Some samples of observation and preliminary questions are shown below. This table is not necessarily a format you might use in your study. It is meant to illustrate the process you might be thinking as you begin observing a passage.

| Text | Observation | Preliminary Questions |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|--|
| James, | Writer's name | Who is he? Is he mentioned elsewhere in the Bible? Does the Bible mention more than one James? If so, which one is this one? |
| a servant | His self-description | A common word, but how do we define it? Like a butler? A farm laborer? Something else? |
| of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, | Who he serves | Why does he mention both? What does that tell us about his understanding of who Jesus is? |

| Text | Observation | Preliminary Questions |
|------------------------------------|---|---|
| To the twelve tribes | Who he writes to | Who is his audience? Twelve tribes of Israel? Jews? Converted Jews? |
| in the Dispersion: | Description of his audience | What's a dispersion? Why does he use that particular description? How does that affect what he is going to say to them? |
| Greetings. | Beginning of the letter | A formality? Like "Dear ..." in letters we write? |
| ² Count it | A command, instruction | What does it mean to "count" something as something else? |
| all joy, | "all" added to joy | What does he say about joy? We all want joy? What exactly is joy? |
| my brothers, | Another description of the readers | What brothers? Literal family? Other believers? Just being polite? |
| when you meet trials | "When" not "if" Plural, not just one trial | How do trials fit with joy? Does he assume readers will "meet" trials? What does it mean to meet a trial? Why start his letter with this? |
| of various kinds, | Extent of trials | Does he mean any trial at all? Is there any qualification or limit on the experiences he is describing? |
| ³ for | Giving a reason | Explanation of what he is saying. Why should we think joy is related to trials? |
| you know | A fact about his readers | Something they already know, or that they should know. Why does he need to remind them? |
| that the testing | "Testing" instead of "trials" | Why does he change words? Do they mean the same thing? If not, how are they different? |
| of your faith | What is tested | How is faith tested? Isn't faith unquestioning acceptance? |
| produces steadfastness. | Something that happens, a cause and a result | How could testing result in steadfastness? What does that tell us about his idea of "testing"? What does he mean by steadfastness? |
| ⁴ And let steadfastness | Repeated word Must be important | If steadfastness is not the end in itself, what does it lead to? |
| have its full effect, | What steadfastness leads to | Why "full" effect? Is it possible to have only a partial effect of steadfastness? What would that look like? |
| that | Purpose, the end result | The final part of his thought process that started with joy. |

| Text | Observation | Preliminary Questions |
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| you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. | His goal for his readers | <p>What does it mean to be</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perfect? Is that the same as sinless? • Complete? Are we incomplete without testing? How is “complete” different from “perfect”? • Lacking in nothing? Don’t trials often cause a lack (finances, health, relationships)? <p>How is joy related to these three characteristics?</p> |
| ⁵ If | Condition – something that might be true | What are the conditions or circumstances that he is considering? |
| any of you | “any” | Could anyone be exempt, or is he describing a potential situation for any of his readers? |
| lacks wisdom, | “lack” repeated from verse 7 | Is the lack of wisdom related to the trials and testing in the previous paragraph? How is wisdom related to steadfastness (v. 3, 4)? |
| let him | A command, instruction, suggestion | How does he intend this – an absolute command or a helpful suggestion? What would the difference be? |
| ask God, | What to do | How do we recognize the lack of wisdom? How else might we react to that lack? Is he using “ask” as a synonym for “prayer”? |
| who gives generously | A fact about God | Is James only talking about wisdom? Does this tell us anything about God’s generosity in other areas? |
| to all | “all” compared with “any” and “him” (v. 5) | Does he mean all people? All Christians? All Christians with some level of faith? |
| without reproach, | Another fact about God | How would you define “reproach”? What would reproach from God look like? What might be the difference between giving generously with or without reproach? |
| and it will be given him. | Clear result | Is this the outcome of the condition (the “if” at the beginning of v. 5)? What is the logic James gives us: “If...do that...this will result...”? |
| ⁶ But | Contrast; a possible exception to what was said before | Is the result (“it will be given” in v. 5) uncertain? What does James say that defines or clarifies the “If” condition from v. 5? |
| let him | Another command, instruction, suggestion | Is this to the same “him” mentioned in v. 5? Is this still part of the condition started in that verse? |
| ask | What to do | Is this the same command as v. 5? |

| Text | Observation | Preliminary Questions |
|--|--|---|
| in faith, | How to ask; repetition of “faith” in v. 3 | Why does he change from “who” to ask in v. 5 (God) and now he specifies “how” to ask? How are those two aspects of asking related? How is this mention of faith related to faith in v. 3? |
| with no doubting, | More about how to ask | Is “in faith” the same as “no doubting”? Is it possible to have faith and doubt at the same time? Are faith and doubt “all or nothing” conditions? |
| for | An explanation or reason for what he has said | Why is doubting a problem? |
| the one who doubts | Focused on a particular behavior “doubt” repeated from earlier in the verse | Is this the same one who asks in v. 5? What might it look like to ask and doubt at the same time? Why is James so concerned about doubt? |
| is like | A comparison | Why does he use a comparison? What about the comparison might help him make his point? |
| a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. | Figurative language, using an illustration from nature | What are the characteristics of waves? How does the visual image of a stormy body of water help communicate the abstract idea of “doubt”? |
| ⁷ For | An explanation or reason for what he has said | How does this “for” relate to the “for” in the middle of v. 6? Is this a parallel reason? Is this a completely new reason? Is this a subcategory of that reason? |
| that person | Singular, an individual | Which person? What situation is James referring to – “any of you” (v. 5), “him” (v. 6a), “one who doubts” (v. 6b)? |
| must not suppose | Negative command, limitation | What does it mean to “suppose” something? How is “supposing” related to faith mentioned in vv. 3, 6? |
| that he will receive anything from the Lord; | What not to “suppose” | Does this limitation only apply to asking for wisdom? Is James making a universal statement about anything we ask of God? |
| ⁸ he is a double-minded man, | Description of “that person” (v. 7a) similar to “doubt” | What does “double-minded” mean? How is “double-minded” related to “doubt” (vv. 6)? How is “double-minded” related to “faith” (vv. 3, 6). |
| unstable in all his ways. | Final negative description; contrast with “steadfast” (v. 3, 4) | How does “unstable” help understand what James means by “steadfast”? How does it relate to “perfect and complete” (v. 4). |