

Learning to Observe (Mark 1:1-8)

What are you especially good at noticing? People, places, details in a movie, etc.

Great artists, great detectives, and great thinkers are all great observers. They see things that others don't see. For example, Monet painted the same church building more than 30 times attempting to catch the changing light that he meticulously observed. And those works are now admired around the world. (See the link below.)

[Monet's Rouen Cathedral](#)

The famous fictional detective Sherlock Holmes knew small details such as the number of stairs on a particular staircase. And that kind of knowledge would help him solve mystery cases. Likewise, the great philosophers and scientists notice things that most people miss.

If you're going to be a great observer, what are the qualities you will need?

- Curiosity. Great observers are usually inquisitive people. They are constantly questioning: "Why is this over here? How did this happen? Who did that?" So if we're going to be good observers of a text we can't be afraid to ask honest questions about the text.
- Patience. Great observers are patient. They don't rush. They allow things to unfold in time. We have to take our time to see things as they really are. When we get bored, we should fight through the boredom and keep observing.

In order to be a good Bible reader, or a good reader in general, we have to be good observers of words, sentences, and paragraphs. This skill is especially important for reading ancient literature because ancient authors didn't use italics, underlining, or bold letters to emphasize things.

If you couldn't use those devices in your writing to emphasize a point, what would you use?

In order to draw attention to something, the writers of the New Testament often repeated it, placed it at the beginning, or included it in a unique way.

So let's apply what we have learned.

Mark 1:1-8

We'll begin learning the skill of observation with eight verses—Mark 1:1-8.

An observation is simply anything you notice. To give you an idea of how to record your observations, here's Mark 1:1:

The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah,^[a] the Son of God,^[b]

Footnotes:

a. Mark 1:1 Or *Jesus Christ. Messiah* (Hebrew) and *Christ* (Greek) both mean *Anointed One*.

b. Mark 1:1 Some manuscripts do not have *the Son of God*.

What can we observe about that verse?

- The book is about Jesus the Messiah (v. 1).
- Jesus is called both Messiah (or Christ) and Son of God (v. 1).
- There is uncertainty about the phrase “the Son of God” (v. 1).

Notice that I have included the verse number in parenthesis at the end of each observation.

Okay, now it's your turn. Don't look below until you have given yourself plenty of time to record your observations on Mark 1:1-8.

Did you list your own observations?

Really?

Are you sure?

Okay, in addition to the observations from v. 1, here's what I noticed in this passage:

Observations

- Quotes Isaiah's prophecy (vv. 2-3)
- Implies that John is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy – “And so John came” (v. 4).
- The word for baptize is used 5x – (v. 4 (2x), 5, 8 (2x)).
- The account is rooted in physical geography. Location words are used frequently – desert, Judean countryside, Jerusalem, Jordan River (vv. 3-5).
- John was very popular (v. 5)
- The people did three things:
 - went to John in the desert region (v. 5)
 - confessed their sins (v. 5)

- allowed John to baptize them in the Jordan River (v. 5)
- John did four things:
 - baptized people (v. 4)
 - preached (vv. 4, 7-8)
 - wore clothing made of camel's hair and leather belt (v. 6) (cf. 2 Kings 1:8; Mal. 4:5)
 - ate locusts and wild honey (v. 6)
- John's message:
 - a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (v. 4)
 - the coming of someone far greater than him: (vv. 7-8)
 - more powerful
 - more worthy
 - greater baptism

You've just learned how many Bible teachers and pastors prepare a Bible lesson or sermon. First, they select the passage. Second, they record their observations of that passage.

Questions

But we shouldn't stop with our list of observations because we're not machines that simply record things. We have brains that are always questioning. You probably had many questions that came to mind as you were listing your observations. After all, being curious and asking questions is one of the qualities we need in order to make observations.

Take a few minutes and list all the questions you have about Mark 1:1-8.

Here are ten of my questions.

- What does the footnote mean?
- What does the word gospel mean?
- When did Isaiah live?
- Why did Jesus need an announcer/herald?
- Why was John so odd? (clothing, diet, setting)
- How did John become so popular if he was in the desert?
- Who did the people think John was?
- What exactly were the people confessing?
- What was the significance of baptism?
- Is verse 5 hyperbole? "the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem"

I won't attempt to answer all of these questions here, but I do want to address the first question about the footnote in Mark 1:1.

No one has the original book of Mark, instead we have hundreds of copies in the original language, Greek. The footnote is saying that not every Greek copy has the

phrase “the Son of God.” Why? Before the invention of the printing press in the 15th century everything was copied by hand. Sometimes the copyists made accidental mistakes and sometimes they made corrections because they thought what they were copying was a mistake. We don’t know exactly why the manuscripts have a difference at this point, but it is probably due to one of those two reasons.

In this instance, however, as in most of the uncertain texts, whether the phrase “the Son of God” is original or not doesn’t matter much because ten verses later the same point is made when God calls Jesus his Son.

Here are a few definitions that may help you with your own questions.

Definitions in Mark 1:1

- Gospel = good news.
- Jesus = the Lord saves. The name Jesus was a popular name in the 1st century. It’s the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name Joshua.
- Christ = anointed one. The word Christ is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word Messiah. The anointed one in the Old Testament was the one that was officially set apart for special service such as a king or priest. This official recognition was done by pouring oil on the person’s head. A Christian = a follower of Christ.
- The Son of God = the one who shares the nature of God and has a father-son relationship with God.

Now that we’ve made our observations and asked our questions, let’s summarize what we’ve found.

Summarizing Mark 1:1-8

- The story of Jesus begins with John the Baptist.
- Israel needed to be spiritually prepared for the arrival of the Messiah.
- The story of Jesus includes prophecy and the fulfillment of prophecy:
 - - Isaiah’s prophecy about Jesus’ forerunner
 - John the Baptist was the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy
 - John’s prophecy about the one coming

The emphasis on prophecy is exciting stuff because in v. 9 Jesus arrives giving us two examples of the fulfillment of prophecy in Mark’s opening lines: (1) John fulfills Isaiah’s prophecy, (2) Jesus fulfills John’s prophecy.