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OT 615 Minor Prophets

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SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING YOUR WORK

FORMAT

1. Check "format" section of syllabus for lesson-cover info, e.g., name, SPO, due/completion date.
2. Organize work so that the relationship between parts and the relative importance of the items is clear.
3. Separate observations from inferences (interpretive & evaluative), using either two column format or other clear means for distinguishing the two.
4. Show by notes and format that you understand the connection between the parts of the study process.

SURVEY

5. **Distinguish** between various **levels of structure**--clause, paragraph, segment, and book-level. Segment level structure, e.g., should relate to significant amounts of material in the whole segment.
6. Give sufficient information with your structural observations to make your meaning clear. Present **more than an list of structural labels**. Use survey already to lay out preliminary analysis of the materials related to the structures you are working on.
7. Distinguish between **recurrence of significantly related** items which form a **meaningful pattern** over a unit and a collection of miscellaneous items (e.g., a series of questions on unrelated topics).
8. Generally one must **go beyond simple recurrence** to describe adequately the "logic" in a unit. Recurrence will often be present; **press on to see the logic**.
9. Generally three to five major sets of structural observations will be required to a unit's structure well. Proliferation of structures may signal a fragmented view (Some should be combined? omitted?).
10. Focus a **full, well ordered set of interpretive questions** (Def. > Reason > Impl.) on a single set of observations, so you are not defining one item, reasoning about another, pursuing implications of still another and in the process covering none of them well.
11. Direct interpretive questions both to the materials and to the structures which bind them together.
12. Select your most important set of structural observations and focus your questions there, or ask questions of those items you intend to pursue interpretively. Asking many additional questions is certainly not "wrong," but uses valuable time.
13. Select **key passages on the basis of your structural observations**. Support your choice by reference to those structural observations. Select short passages.
14. Approach **critical issues inductively** too! Do not launch "survey" with study of scholarly works.
15. Distinguish a book's main character from its author.

OBSERVATION-INTERPRETATION-EVALUATION-APPLICATION

16. Proceed **inductively!** Go from evidence to interpretation! Let the material speak for itself.
17. Be **accurate!** Describe what is actually there!
18. **Actually observe; don't just quote** the text.

19. **Actually make observations, not just cryptic remarks.** Label. Describe. Probe. Say something coherent **about the text**.
20. Make sure your "observations," not already interpretations.
21. Go **beyond grammatical identification** to probe significance.
22. Make **specific** observations re. specifics of the text.
23. Remember the **Bulldog** picture. Hang on! Press to second and third round observations/inferences.
24. **Be selective but be thorough.**
25. Work with a single interpretive question or a couple of closely related questions. Carry through before moving to other questions.
26. **Reason clearly.** Make sure your **evidence as stated supports the inferences** drawn from it. Make sure **inferences actually do follow** from the evidence cited.
27. **Actually infer!** Don't simply rephrase observations and think you are inferring, nor substitute additional observation for the drawing of interpretive inferences.
28. **Actually infer!** Don't ask more questions here unless you must. Consider posing these questions in the form of possible inferences to be adjudicated later.
29. Entertain **various possible inferences**
30. **Techno-alert! DON'T JUST DOWNLOAD DATA.** Analyze, process, use that data.
31. **Work systematically** through the various determinants relevant to the question you are answering. Purse one fully; then move to the next.
32. Pursue **beyond definition**. Deal with reasons and implications also after your basic, definitional work.
33. Make **periodic summaries** of your findings and then bring them together in a final, integrative summary.
34. **Distinguish evaluation from interpretation.** Draw evaluative conclusions. Words such as "affirms, revises, expands, rescinds, " etc. normally appear, as opposed to inferences still addressing meaning.
35. **Distinguish interpretation from application.** Talk of what the text meant to "them," not what "I/we" should think or do. Apply after you have interpreted.
36. **Distinguish evaluation from application**, the question of cross-cultural relevance from the actual specification of that relevance for a particular culture.
37. Remember to include the **community of faith/scholars** among your objective determinants.
38. Give **adequate bibliographic** information on sources: author, title, page, at the very least. Note the **author (vs. editor)** of all resources.
39. Don't present ideas from secondary sources as your own, either in observations or inferences.
40. Use **interpretive secondary sources after** your own research, including word study tools such as TWOT, TDOT, TDNT, NIDNTT.
41. **Interact** with interpretive sources. Don't simply cite as authorities without evaluation. Use criteria applied to your own work--evidence? reasoning?

WORD STUDY SUGGESTIONS

UP-FRONT WARNINGS:

- **Computer Bible Programs. Don't just download data**—lists of meanings, Strong's numbers, "prime roots," etc. No! No!
- **Strong's Concordance. Use only** as a concordance or for its numbers. **Do not** use as a dictionary.

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

1. The **goal**: discern the word's basic meaning; what it denotes and connotes.
2. Begin with **preliminary survey** of meaning from standard **Hebrew or Greek lexicons**.*
3. Use **translations/versions** ancient and modern, English and non-English to further gather a **preliminary** understanding of your word. Regard the LXX [OT], Vulgate, Targum [OT], KJV, RSV, NIV, etc. already **as commentaries** on your word, secondary sources already.
4. **Do not use etymology** unless the word's use or that of the family to which it belongs is very limited or its meaning is otherwise obscure. And then use etymology as supplementary, not definitive, evidence. Let the place of etymology in your own word use inform you here.
5. Use a **concordance** that allows you to locate the Hebrew/Greek word in question, either Strong's, Young's, Wigram's or the biblical language concordances.
6. For this class either **study all occurrences** of a word or **give a cogent justification for the selection** of the occurrences cited. Do not use *ad hoc*, random, "illustrative" passages. If necessary, limit the range of your study by: a) Corpus (Pauline, Prophetic, Deuteronomic, Wisdom, Psalms); b) Book itself, if there are several occurrences; c) Given form, e.g., the imperative of "return," *shub* or d) Given expression, "return to me." Draw tentative conclusions when based on limited samples.

DOING THE WORD STUDY

7. Regard the **word as a cipher** (lacking meaning, i.e., = "x") or use the biblical language word itself to refer to it in order to avoid prejudicing your findings, e.g., ruach, or pneuma, not "spirit/wind."
8. Cite each occurrence. **DON'T SIMPLY QUOTE** the verse or cite a string of references. **Describe the word's use** in each context. Be particularly attentive to the data informing you of the word's basic meaning.
9. **Draw inferences** regarding the meaning in your passage, if the particular use appears to be relevant.
10. Remember the **Bulldog** picture here too. In working with each reference, hang on! Press on to second and third level observations and inferences. **Probe. Dig. Look. Reflect.** Don't move on so quickly.
11. Remember the **central task** of word study: **to discover the word's basic meaning**, beginning with the assumption that you do not know what it means. Drawing inferences about various other agendas related in some way to your word is a secondary concern, not primary.
12. Be very careful then to **distinguish** between a) the **meaning of the word itself**, from b) important **ideas** in the context **related to it** but not actually an essential part of the word's actual meaning. Don't load a word's "meaning" with all the items related to it in its various occurrences.
13. **Begin with the immediate book context.** Then proceed to the corpus (e.g., Pauline) or works with similar theological or historical or ideological concerns (e.g., Deuteronomic history, wisdom literature, prophetic, post exilic, etc.).
14. If you are dealing with a **metaphor/simile** ("the booth of David," "like chaff"), first you must discern the word/expression's **concrete** meaning. Then you can infer the **metaphorical meaning**.
15. Be alert to **patterns of use, clusters of meaning**, shades and nuances which differ from setting to setting. Attempt to determine **which best fits your passage**. Do not build a conglomerate (cf. 12).
16. Recognize **informative** and non-informative **uses** and capitalize on the former.
17. Draw conclusions, choosing between possible meanings on the basis of weightiest evidence, on the basis of uses most like your passage, not simply frequency.
18. **After your own examination** of the word's use, supplement and enrich your work by reference (as you have time) to **theological word books**, such as TWOT, TDOT, TDNT, etc. Be particularly alert here for information on extra-biblical uses of the word in cultures influencing your writer. Use critically. Interact.

*e.g., BDB = Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon (Hendrickson); KB = Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner (eds.), Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros (E. J. Brill, 1958); AG = William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (trans.), A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (The University of Chicago Press, 1979); Thayer's = Joseph Henry Thayer, Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Hendrickson).

STANDARD INTERPRETIVE QUESTIONS
BASED ON SELECTED STRUCTURAL OBSERVATIONS

USING THESE QUESTIONS

1. These are sample, "generic" questions of the sort you can ask, guided by the structures. As patterns they are helpful, but also boring. They will come to life if you pour into these patterns the specific content of any particular book or passage you are working with.
2. For example, instead of simply asking after studying Psalm 1, "What is involved in this contrast?" ask "What is involved in the psalmist's contrast between the righteous, their character and fate, on the one hand, and the wicked on the other?" Instead of simply asking, "What is the meaning of the main elements in this contrast?" ask "What is the meaning of the major elements in the psalmist's contrasting picture of the righteous and the wicked?" And so on.

SEMANTIC STRUCTURES

CAUSATION OR SUBSTANTIATION. Materials: What is involved in this cause and this effect? What is the meaning of each of major elements in the cause(s) and the effect(s), and of the cause and effect as a whole? How does this cause produce these effect? How does this effect follow from this cause? What are the full implications of these findings? Structure: What is the significance of this causal structure? Why is this causal or substantiative presentation used? What is implied by the causal or substantiative structure?

CLIMAX. Materials: What is involved in the high point of the unit, and in the materials leading to it? What is the meaning of each? How do the preceding materials lead to this high point? What are the full implications of these findings? Structure: Why does the author use this climactic movement? What is implied by such a presentation?

COMPARISON. Materials: What is involved in each of the elements compared, and what is the meaning of each element? What is the meaning of the other important elements involved in the presentation of this comparison? How does the comparison illuminate the element being compared to it? Wherein are they similar? What are the full implications of these findings? Structure: Why does the writer use comparison? this comparison? What are the implications of the comparison itself?

CONCESSION. Materials: What is the involved in each aspect of the concession, the concession itself ("though...") and the unexpected item ("yet...") related to it? What is the meaning of the major elements in each? What would one have expected to follow the concessionary statement, instead of what appears? How does the "yet-clause" differ from what one might have expected? How does the concession clause lead to the "yet-clause?" Why does the concession appear? What is implied by these findings? Structure: Why does the writer structure the materials thus? What is implied by the concessionary structure itself?

CONTRAST. Materials: What is involved in the contrast? What is the meaning of each of the major elements involved in the contrast? What are the differences between the contrasted elements, and what is the meaning of these differences? What is implied by these findings? Structure: What is the significance of the contrast itself? Why does the author present the material in this contrasted fashion? What is implied by the use of this contrast?

CRUCIALITY/PIVOT. Materials: What is the meaning of the major elements involved in the pivotal point in this unit? What is involved in each? How does the pivot serve to change the direction of the unit? How does what precedes lead to it, and how does what follows flow from it? What are the implications of these findings? Structure: Why does the author use such cruciality? What is implied by the presentation of pivot in this unit?

INSTRUMENTATION. Materials: What is involved in both the means and the end(s)? What is the meaning of the means used and end(s) intended or produced? What is the meaning of the other elements involved in this instrumental presentation. How do the means serve as instruments for realizing the ends, and how is the end made possible through the means? What are the implications of these findings? Structure: Why does the author structure these elements instrumentally? What may be implied by this?

INTERROGATION. Materials: What is involved in each question (problem) and each answer (solution)? What is the meaning of the major elements involved in the question and the answer? What do the question and the answer mean? How does the answer/solution respond to the question/problem? What are the full implications of these findings? Structure: Why does the writer use this movement from question/problem to answer/solution? What is implied by this structure?

ORIENTATION (INTRODUCTION). Materials: What is involved in the preparatory materials, and in those materials for which they prepare? What is the meaning of the major elements in both? How do these materials serve to orient the reader for what follows? How does what follows relate to this orientation? Why such an introduction? What is implied by these findings? Structure: Why does the writer thus structure the work? What is implied by the orientation structure itself?

PARTICULARIZATION/GENERALIZATION. Materials: What is involved in the general statement(s) and in the particulars? What is the meaning of the major elements of both the general statement and its particulars? How does the general statement illuminate the particulars, and vice versa? What are the full implications of each?

RECURRENCE/CORRESPONDENCE. Materials: What is involved in each of the recurring elements, and what is their meaning? Why are they repeatedly cited? What is implied by these findings? Structure: Why does the writer make recurring mention of these matters? What is implied by this recurrence?

SUMMARIZATION. Materials: What is involved in the components in the summary? What is the meaning of each? How do they summarize the content of the unit? What are the full implications of these findings? Structure: What does the writer use such a summary? What is implied by the summarization?

RHETORICAL STRUCTURES

CHIASM. Materials: What is the meaning of the major elements placed in the chiasmic order, and what is involved in them? To what semantic structure does this chiasm apparently relate, and how does this rhetorical device function with reference to it? What do these findings imply? Structure: Why does the writer place these elements chiasmically? What may be implied by the structure itself?

INCLUSIO. Materials: What is meaning of the major elements arrayed in this inclusio? What is involved in them? To what semantic structure does this inclusio apparently relate, and how does this rhetorical device function with reference to it? What do these findings imply? Structure: Why does the writer place these elements thus? What may be implied by the structure itself?

INTERCHANGE. Materials: What is meaning of the major elements placed in this alternating order? What is involved in them? To what semantic structure does this interchange apparently relate, and how does this rhetorical device function with reference to it? What do these findings imply? Structure: Why does the writer place these elements thus? What may be implied by the structure itself?

SUGGESTIONS FOR OBSERVATION/ANALYSIS
i.e., FOR GATHERING EVIDENCE FOR INTERPRETATION¹

OBSERVATION/ANALYSIS

1. What are observations? Any safe, true statements you can make about material (clauses or other units) that could probably not be called into question by a cautious, thoughtful reading of the text. This sort of "observation" (as opposed to simple, grammatical identification: "'created' is a past tense verb") is indeed a form of interpretation, but one that is "low-level." These observations/analyses are evidence from which one can draw inferences, furthering one's understanding of a passage.

2. What sorts of things can be observed? Absolutely anything at all, though one attempts to focus on apparently significant matters. The following list is selective, but may be helpful.
 - a. Structure. What structural relations (semantic, rhetorical, correspondence), bind the unit to surrounding materials, or bind elements within the unit together.
 - b. Grammar. What grammatical relations and roles bind words and phrases to each other? What are the antecedents of pronouns? What parts of speech?
 - c. Inflection. What gender, number, case, person, tense, voice, mood?
 - d. Word Use. How is a given word used, in an immediate passage, in the book, and the larger corpus (cf. App. II, 5)?
 - e. Classification. What labels can be applied to various components of the unit? e.g., concrete, abstract; collective, individual; definite, indefinite; absolute, inclusive, exclusive; negative, neutral, positive; etc. regarding scope, range and other matters.
 - f. Literary matters. What figures of speech are evident? What of genre, style, atmosphere, quotations or allusions to other documents?
 - g. Selection. What appears to be missing, present, substituted, or positioned contrary to expectations?
 - h. Position. Where in space and time (absolute or relative) is the action depicted to be located?
 - i. Criticism. Where do English versions differ from each other and from the biblical language text? What text/redaction/form-critical problems or data are evident? What problems in punctuation exist?
 - j. Emphasis. Where is emphasis to be placed in reading the unit? What of word order? What is old and what is new information in the unit?
 - k. Implication. What appears to be clearly, obviously implied though not stated? What assumptions does the material make? (Be sure not to be too interpretive here. Draw only the safest implications in the course of "observation.")

3. How can format help? The "two-column" format, which places "observations / evidence" in the left column and "inferences / conclusions" in the right column, aims to heighten the student's awareness of the difference between observing/gathering evidence and inferring/drawing interpretive conclusions. Even though the difference between observing and inferring is blurred in some cases, the distinction is very much worth attempting. Some persons prefer a set of observations followed by a set of related inferences. No matter. The hermeneutical awareness, not the format is the point.

SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

Sources marked with asterisk (*) are mandatory for our work.

1. Literary (as synchronic, authorial, literary wholes)
 - a.* Segment Context. Always the first, and usually the most important field examined. Study (i.e., analyze) your segment, paragraph, and clause for useful evidence. Draw extensively upon the observations you have already made.
 - b.* Book Context. Next most important field of evidence. Review your book-level analysis; use concordances as needed.
 - c.* Corpus Context. All books written by the same author (e.g., Luke and Acts; all of the Pauline epistles; all of John's material) tend to employ the same network of thought and

¹Adapted, with permission, from the work of Drs. Joseph Dongell, David Bauer and Robert Traina.

language, though attention to chronological development within a writer's works is needed. Use concordances, chain reference tools, etc. to access.

2. Literary-historical.
 - a.* New Testament Context. Great care must be taken here not to force harmonization, not to force one text to interpret another, not to force into alignment linguistic usage and networks of thought. Use concordances, chain reference tools, etc. to access.
 - b.* Old Testament. Comprises the "bible" of early Christianity and Judaism. Its materials almost always form the backdrop of NT passages. Use concordances, chain reference tools, etc. to access. Same cautions apply as with NT context.
 - c. Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha. The most important extra-biblical field of data for NT interpretation. A fascinating assortment of religious texts.
 - d. Rabbinic Materials. The Mishnah (compiled about 200 A.D.) and the Babylonian Talmud (6th Century A.D.) are the most important for our purposes, and contain within them many traditions contemporary with the NT (though dating, etc., remains a major problem in the use of these materials).
 - e. Josephus. Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, who narrated much Jewish history in NT times. Lived approximately 37-100 A.D.
 - f. Philo. Jewish philosopher, Philo Judaeus, born perhaps ca. 20. B.C. and dying sometime after 40 A.D. Sought to express and understand OT texts and theology in terms of Greek philosophies.
 - g. Dead Sea Scrolls. A collection of liturgies, biblical commentaries, poetry and community rules discovered in 1947. Apparently stowed away by a Jewish ascetic sect which flourished near the Dead Sea from about 140 B.C. until about 68 A.D.
 - h. "Ancient Near Eastern Texts." Particularly relevant for OT interpretation are various administrative, literary, cultic, historical and other texts of different genres from the Mediterranean and Mesopotamian civilizations, though date and provenance is often problematic. Access through anthologies (such as James B. Pritchard's Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament or D. Winton Thomas' Documents from Old Testament Times) or published word studies.
 - i. Collected here are literatures which, on the whole, have lesser impact on NT interpretation: the Targums (Aramaic paraphrases of the OT); the Nag Hammadi codices (discovered in 1945, a library of Christian gnostic writings composed from the 1st to 4th centuries A.D.); New Testament Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha (Christian materials not included in the NT and often "heretical"); Apostolic Fathers (a group of early Christian, non-canonical documents). Greek Non-Literary Papyri (syntax and vocabulary of the NT is illuminated by these mundane materials found in the Egyptian desert); Classical and Hellenistic (Pagan) Literature (Various aspects of NT thought and language can be illuminated by appeal to this massive field of literature.)
3. Literary (diachronic, traditional)
 - a. Ancient manuscripts, translations, etc.
 - b. Source Criticism
 - c. Form Criticism
 - d. Redaction Criticism
4. Artifactual. Non-literary materials as are discovered and interpreted by archaeology and historical geography, and the like; e.g., coins, statues, architecture.

Topics for Exploration in Detailed Observation²

It is easy, when doing Detailed Observation, to fall into the rut of generating Observations, Questions, and Possibilities about too narrow a range of topics. One could, for example, note all the differences between translations and every important grammatical feature while failing to explore any of the “silences” of the text or any its literary character. The following list may be used to broaden the scope of inquiry and to prevent a limited approach to the text. This list may be consulted continually as the student works verse-by-verse throughout a text.

- A. Basic Content:** The journalist’s friends of “who? what? where? when?” prove useful to us as well. The matters of “why” and “how” can be particularly powerful tools probing deeply below the surface.
- B. Word Meanings:** Each word can be lifted up and examined like a rock. Too often we carelessly assume the meanings of obscure words, or download heavy theological meaning into unsuspecting words.
- C. Sequences and Orders:** The order in which words appear may signal emphasis. The order in which items are mentioned may serve to rank their importance.
- D. Grammar and Syntax:** The grammatical relationships between words can be a rich source of insight. Verb tenses, noun cases, pronoun antecedents and the like often provide the careful reader with issues of interpretation.
- E. Literary Issues:** A host of matters await to be recognized by readers, including symbolism, authorial style, use of figures of speech, irony, characterization, plot movement, emphasis, and the like.
- F. Textual Issues:** The original wording of a text may be in some doubt, given differences in ancient manuscripts. Some of these differences may show up when comparing different Bible translations, though not all will.
- G. Translational Issues:** At various points, translations may depend upon the same original-language wording but translate (and/or interpret) a passage differently.
- H. Logical Connections:** Ideas and events may be connected to each other through the relationships of cause-effect (causation); question-answer, problem-solution (interrogation); similarity (comparison); difference (contrast); part-whole or whole-part (generalization or particularization); claim-proof

² From the work of Joseph Dongell, used with permission and gratitude in David Thompson’s IBS classes. Pentateuch Fall 98.

(substantiation); stage setting or reader orientation (preparation); and the like.

- I. Intertextuality:** A passage may include within itself a quotation of or an allusion to some other literary work (often a NT quotation of or allusion to an OT passage).
- J. Documentary History:** A passage may consist of the author's merging or compilation of different sources. Some of the seams of composition may be visible in a close reading the passage.
- K. Historical Context:** A reader may be alert for matters pointing to: 1) specific cultural issues and values involving either the characters in a narrative or the writer of the passage; 2) specific motivations of the writer, and specific purposes of the writer with relation the readers; 3) the general historical, political, economic, and cultural framework of the passage.
- L. The Unstated:** This avenue of attention always yields interesting results, and points us to the "iceberg principle" that what is seen (explicitly written) is only 10% of the iceberg (all that is implied in the communication). One may notice: 1) a speaker's unstated assumptions; 2) information *not* supplied by the speaker or writer; 3) gaps and silences in stories or arguments; 4) the clear implication of a passage, though left unstated by the writer or speaker.
- M. Selections:** Every element in a discourse has been chosen instead of other possible selections. In large measure, these "choices" constitute the "meaning" of a passage. One can begin to learn the significance of "selections" by imagining a vertical skewer stuck through each word of a sentence, and by picturing on each skewer (above and below the word in the sentence) the other words not selected at that position in the sentence. For example, Psalm 23 declares "The *Lord* is my shepherd", not God is my shepherd; "the Lord is *my* shepherd", not your shepherd, not our shepherd; "the Lord is my *shepherd*", not my king, my prince, or my father; "the Lord *is* my shepherd", not was, or will be my shepherd. The significance of "The Lord is my shepherd" comes into sharper focus when the *rejected* choices come into view.
- N. The Problematic:** Any *apparent* difficulties of a passage often provide rich avenues of exploration, particularly: 1) apparent tensions or contradictions; 2) apparent loose ends; 3) surprises to the reader; 4) apparent impossibilities or unlikelys. Most of these prove not to be "problems with the Bible" but the Bible's own invitation to a more profound encounter with itself.

Added Advice Regarding Observations

Many find it difficult to avoid weaknesses in Observations. Three areas have tended to be troublesome, as expressed in the following questions often asked by students:

A. How can I “go beneath the surface”?

A “depth problem” can often be helped by attending particularly to these topics among those listed above: 1) matters of “how” and “why” in the category of Basic Content; 2) Logical Connections; 3) The Unstated; 4) Selections; and 5) The Problematic.

B. Do all of my Observations have to be “profound”?

No. Most Observations (and perhaps many questions) will be routine, serving to record accurately the various bits of information provided by the text.

C. How can I be certain my Observation is a fact, not merely an opinion?

We suggest that a “fact” be understood as something “relatively certain”, rather than something provable only by the most rigorous logic. If we can think that 90% of an imaginary group of careful, dispassionate readers would agree that our statement about the text is “true”, based solely upon their reading of the text, then we can consider our statement to be an Observations. Otherwise, it should be recorded as a Possibility.

D. How can I avoid merely repeating the words of the text?

Here is a most nagging and challenging difficulty. Remember, an Observation is a statement *we readers make about the text*, not simply the words of the text itself! Three strategies will help. 1) Pinpoint exactly what the focus of your Observation is. Typically, Observations which merely repeat a sentence of text have not focused on a specific aspect of the text. 2) You may also find it helpful to start your Observation with the words “I notice that” This sets you up to be making a statement about the text. 3) Use an italicized key word or term to help you state the exact focus of the Observation.

E.g.:

“I notice that the *scope* of...

“I see that the *time* of...

“I observe that the *agent* of...

“I realize that the *manner* of...

“I notice that the *translation* of...

“I see that the *cause* of...

“I observe that the *purpose* of...

“I realize that the *character* of...

A wide variety of such key terms can help you identify the specific focus of your Observation: location, time, sequence, manner, order, position, arrangement, selection, identity, character, characteristic, orientation, shape, color, dimension, rate, frequency, atmosphere, attitude, circumstance, designation, relationship, purpose, similarity,

difference, cause, effect, result, reason, agent, instrument, means, problem, solution, general, particular, set item, scope, range, content, ambiguity, silence emphasis, limit, extent, exclusion, action, event, number, mode, audience, speaker, role, assumption, presumption, implication, climax, progression, movement, context, setting, repetition, recurrence, series, assertion, negation, implication, connection, description, alternation, summation, expansion, reaction, style, structure, plot, conclusion, theme, division, material, classification, destination, origin, source, object, etc....

HISTORY OF ISRAEL STUDY GUIDE

I. KNOW BY DATES (where given), major accomplishments or points of intersection with Israelite history, and major contemporaries:

Saul	Joshua (high priest)
David	Ezra
Solomon	Nehemiah
Omri	Shalmaneser III
Jeroboam I	Tiglath-Pileser III
Ahab	Shalmaneser V
Jehu	Sargon II
Jeroboam II	Nebuchadrezzar
Uzziah	Cyrus
Hezekiah	Darius I
Josiah	Shesh-Bazzar
Zerubbabel	

II. KNOW AND DATE BY CONTEMPORARIES

Amos	Jeremiah
Isaiah	Ezekiel
Hosea	Haggai
Micah	Zechariah

III. SIGNIFICANT DATES (B.C.)³

958	587
921	539-38
853	515
722	458
701	445

IV. CITIES AND COUNTRIES/AREAS; identify and locate:

Samaria	Thebes	Israel
Jerusalem	Tyre	Judah
Nineveh	Sidon	Egypt
Babylon	Edom	Assyria
Damascus	Moab	Gaza
Susa	Ammon	

³In many cases approximate, but relatively secure.