

## Inductive Bible Study

### OBSERVATION

- This step in the study is the, “What does the text say?” step.
  - Begin with prayer, ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate your mind to God’s truth.
  - Observe the text as a **whole** and then as a **single** work.
    - Because the context gives meaning to the particular words, phrases, and sentences, look for obvious facts, details, or ideas to establish the framework in studying a book, chapter, or passage.
- 1.) Read and reread the book several times (at least 3 times) to get the big picture and an understanding of the whole.
  - 2.) Determine the type of literature of the book.
    - a. Such as epistle, prophecy, history, book of law, Gospel, etc.
  - 3.) Identify **obvious names** by reading through the text and *marking a distinctive way* every reference to the 1.) author(s) 2.) recipient(s) 3.) other significant people (including pronouns). Then ask yourself, *who, what, where, why, when, and how* for these people.
  - 4.) Identify **obvious events**. Ask yourself *who, what, where, why, when, and how* and list what you learn.
  - 5.) Identify key **repeated** words (or phrases/statements) in the book and *mark them distinctively*. Make a list of what the text says about each repeated word.
  - 6.) Take a stab at the **main theme** of the book. What is the repeated emphasis of the book? Look for a key verse in the book that best expresses that theme Finally, write out a summary statement of the book, using as many key words as possible.
  - 7.) Develop a **character chart** for a visual overview of the book. On this chart fill in a chapter theme/summary for each chapter. **Chapter themes** should both deal with the chapter’s main subject and relate to the overall theme of the book.
  - 8.) Finally, detail **clearly defined segments in the book**. These are major divisions in the book, like a group of verses or chapters that deal with the same subject, doctrine, person, etc. Include them on your chapter chart.

#### *Observe chapter by chapter:*

- 1.) Type out (double spaced) each chapter as you study it to mark up, or mark in your Bible directly. (I hate writing in my Bible, so I type it out. I encourage you to type it out too – it gives you more space to write and mark. If you ever need a printable version of a book, e-mail me and I’ll try to get you one.)
- 2.) Read the chapter several times asking *who, what, where, why, when, and how*, marking key words, and making lists of all those words.

- 3.) Read the chapter again, looking for *contrasts, comparisons, expressions of time, and terms of conclusion* (e.g. therefore, for, since, then) or result. Then look for the point(s) being made in each of the conclusions or results.
- 4.) Recheck chapter themes and make necessary changes.
- 5.) Identify paragraph summaries/themes within each chapter.

## INTERPRETATION

Here are the basic principals of interpretation from Kay Arthur's *How to Study the Bible*.

- 1.) **Context Rules!** Always interpret a passage in light of the context surrounding it. Never take a passage out of context.
- 2.) **Seek the counsel of the whole Word of God.** One or two isolated verses are not enough to determine doctrine; you must consider the whole Bible.
- 3.) **Remember that Scripture never contradicts Scripture.** If there seems to be a contradiction or an inconsistency between passages, your interpretation is incomplete or incorrect. Gather more information to discover the meaning.
- 4.) **Do not base your doctrine on an obscure passage of Scripture.** Base it on clear, repeated teachings of Scripture.
- 5.) **Look for the author's intended meaning of the passage.** What did the author mean, what did the original audience understand this to mean when they read it?

Here are some good tips to help you interpret your observed passage, book, or verse.

- 1.) Do word studies using concordances and expository dictionaries. (I use Strong's Concordance and Vine's Expository dictionary). Remember, however, that the context determines the word's meaning more than a definition of it (although Strong's and Vine's is good at making sure you are getting the contextual meaning.)
- 2.) Look up cross-references because *Scripture is the best interpreter of Scripture*.
- 3.) Consider figures of speech
- 4.) Lastly, after studying the text yourself, consult commentaries to check your interpretations (or with a Christian friend, Bible study, etc.)

## APPLICATION

Application is a very important part of this study. Knowing the Word of God and not doing it is useless. It is important that we take what we learn from our observations and interpretations and apply it to our life so that we can Glorify God in all that we do (1 Corinthians 10:31).

- 1.) What does the passage teach? What am I to do/believe/change as a result of this passage? Is it general or specific? Does it apply onto a specific era in history, a specific people or a cultural problem of that day?
- 2.) Does this Scripture expose any errors in my belief system or my behavior? Are wrong attitudes or motives brought to light? What will I choose to do about these?

- 3.) What is God's instruction to me in this passage? Are there...
  - a. Commands to obey?
  - b. Promises to claim?
  - c. Examples to follow
  - d. New truths to believe?
  - e. Errors to avoid?
  - f. Prayers to pray?
  - g. Sins to confess?
  - h. Things to praise God for?
- 4.) Pray before you get into the Word. That you will be continually reminded of its applications in your daily life – moment by moment.

I hope this helps! If you have any questions about *anything* (this way of studying, about Scripture, or just life) e-mail me at [knwilson@purdue.edu](mailto:knwilson@purdue.edu).

For extended explanation of the inductive Bible study method read *How to Study Your Bible* by Kay Arthur and *Living by the Book* by Howard Hendricks.