

## ***INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY***

### **1. Definition and Distinctives.**

- a. Inductive Bible study is discovering truth for yourself with the Holy Spirit as guide.
  - (1) Combines detailed critical study of minute points with the synthetic/holistic study of whole biblical books or groups of books in one's heart language.
  - (2) Ask one to immerse oneself in the observation of the text with a view towards drawing one's own conclusions regarding its meaning.
  - (3) An inductive approach gives students the resources and encouragement to discover truth, and especially biblical truth, for themselves.
- b. It emphasises the first-hand, direct study of Scripture.
  - (1) **Ac 17:11** 11 These Jews [at Berea] were more noble than those in Thessalonica. They received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.
- c. It commits to the primary source (the Bible), not secondary sources (commentaries or other Christian books).
  - (1) It follows the Latin precept, *ad fontes*.
  - (2) To show the superior accuracy of primary sources, play the game of "telephone."
- d. It starts with observations, and lots of them.
  - (1) The inductive approach starts with observations, and theories are proposed towards the end of the research process as a result of observations. Inductive research involves the search for patterns from observation and the development of explanations...for those patterns through series of hypotheses. This approach aims to generate meanings from the data set collected in order to identify patterns and relationships to build a theory.<sup>1</sup>
- e. It searches for the original author's intended meaning to his original audience.
- f. It's the most profitable way to study the Bible.
  - (1) Other ways of studying the Bible are legitimate, but inductive study is best.
  - (2) Inductive Bible study is the first thing one learns in many seminaries and is what the best Bible preachers and teachers practice regularly.
- g. It works well in literary cultures, but also even in oral ones.
  - (1) Of course, oral inductive Bible study would work differently.
- h. In the gospels, Jesus often uses an inductive approach.
  - (1) **Mt 16:13** 13 When Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, Who do people say that the Son of Man is?
  - (2) **Mt 17:25** 25 When [Peter] came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tax? From their sons or from others?
  - (3) **Mt 21:23-25** 23 When [Jesus] entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority? 24 Jesus answered them, I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell

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<sup>1</sup> W. Goddard and S. Melville, *Research Methodology: An Introduction*, 2nd ed., Blackwell Publishing, 2004; H. R. Bernard, *Research Methods in Anthropology*, 5th ed. (AltaMira Press, 2005), 7; M. Saunders, P. Lewis, and A. Thornhill, *Research Methods for Business Students*, 6th ed. (Pearson Education Limited, 2012).

you by what authority I do these things. 25 The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?

- (4) **Mt 21:28** 28 What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, Son, go and work in the vineyard today....
- (5) **Mt 22:41-46** 41 Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question 42 saying, What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he? They said to him, The son of David. 43 He said to them, How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord saying, 44 The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet? 45 If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son? 46 And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

## 2. Comparison with Deductive Study.

- a. There is absolutely a place for deductive, authoritative teaching.
- (1) **Ne 8:1-8** 1 All the people gathered as one man at the square that was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses that Yahweh had given to Israel. 2 Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women, and all who could listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. 3 He read from it before the square that was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand. And all the people were attentive to the book of the law. 4 Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium that they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood.... 5 Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people. And when he opened it, all the people stood up. ...7 Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, explained the law to the people while the people remained in their place. 8 They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.
- b. The inductive approach is a better way to learn.
- (1) "I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand."<sup>2</sup>
- (2) "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime."<sup>3</sup>
- c. The inductive approach does not come naturally and must be taught.
- d. Deductive teaching is better appreciated once individual inductive study is done.
- e. What we teach deductively must derive from what we learn inductively.
- (1) "[Biblical] theology builds directly on biblical exegesis and leads or should lead—to systematic theology. What this ultimately means is that the church must be prepared to modify its traditions, creeds, and confessions if such biblically based exegesis and theology clearly dictate it should. Such modification should not be needed in the case of universally acknowledged doctrines of the historic Christian faith, but it could happen from time to time with the church's understanding of other doctrines and certain passages of Scripture. If this means that systematic

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<sup>2</sup> Confucius.

<sup>3</sup> Chinese proverb.

theology must to some extent always be in a state of flux, so be it. In the final analysis, Scripture itself, when interpreted properly through the process of biblical exegesis and when synthesised legitimately through the process of biblical theology, must stand in judgment on all our humanly devised systems of theology. All of us need to be more careful in biblical interpretation lest we become unduly influenced by the preunderstandings we bring to the text from a philosophically based systematic theology (as opposed to a biblically based theology)."<sup>4</sup>

- f. A combination of daily individual inductive study, weekly small group discussion, and weekly deductive teaching on the same passage will produce outstanding results.

### Inductive and Deductive Methods Compared

Inductive	Deductive
Bottom-up approach	Top-down approach
Teaches how to think	Teaches what to think
Reliance on self-study	Reliance on the pastor's study
Focus on the Bible	Focus on commentaries/systematic theologies
High engagement/participation	Low engagement/participation
Study book by book	Study topic by topic
Prioritises observation	Prioritises interpretation and systemisation
Pays close attention to context	Often overlooks context
Low financial cost	High financial cost
No Bible college or seminary education needed	Bible college or seminary education needed
Easy to multiply	Difficult to multiply
Results in unity among believers	Often results in disunity among believers
Creates disciplined, mature, resilient believers	Often creates undisciplined, immature, weak believers
Develops youth who cling to the Christian faith	Often develops youth who leave the Christian faith

### 3. The Assumptions of Inductive Bible Study.

- a. The Bible is God's written communication to us, his love letter to humanity.
- b. We need biblical truth every day.
  - (1) **Mt 4:4** 4 [Jesus] answered, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.
- c. Every word of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is directly inspired by God.
  - (1) **2 Ti 3:16-17** 16 All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth Barker, in Roy B. Zuck, *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991).

- (2) **2 Pe 1:20-21** 20 No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the desire of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.
- d. The Bible is authoritative on all matters about which it speaks.
- e. The Bible contains all the truth we need to live a life pleasing to God.
- (1) **2 Ti 3:16-17** 16 All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.
- f. Everyday, ordinary believers can understand the Bible.
- (1) **Ps 119:99-102** 99 I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation. 100 I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts. 101 I hold back my feet from every evil way, in order to keep your word. 102 I do not turn aside from your rules, for you have taught me.
- (2) "I would have the weakest woman read the Gospels and Epistles of St. Paul.... I would have those words translated into all languages, so that not only Scots and Irishmen, but Turks and Saracens might read them. I long for the plowboy to sing them to himself as he follows the plow, the weaver to hum them to the tune of his shuttle, the traveler to beguile with them the dullness of his journey.... Other studies we may regret having undertaken, but happy is the man upon whom death comes when he is engaged in these. These sacred words give you the very image of Christ speaking, healing, dying, rising again, and make him so present, that were he before your very eyes you would not more truly see him."<sup>5</sup>
- g. God intends us to read the Bible in plain, literal, ordinary, common sense way.
- (1) "When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense. Therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the fact of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths indicate clearly otherwise."<sup>6</sup>
- h. Book by book study is more profitable than topic by topic study.
- (1) The best way to study the Bible is book by book, not topic by topic. It's the way the Bible was written. God didn't lay out truth topic by topic. It was book by book.<sup>7</sup>

#### 4. The Goals of Inductive Bible Study.

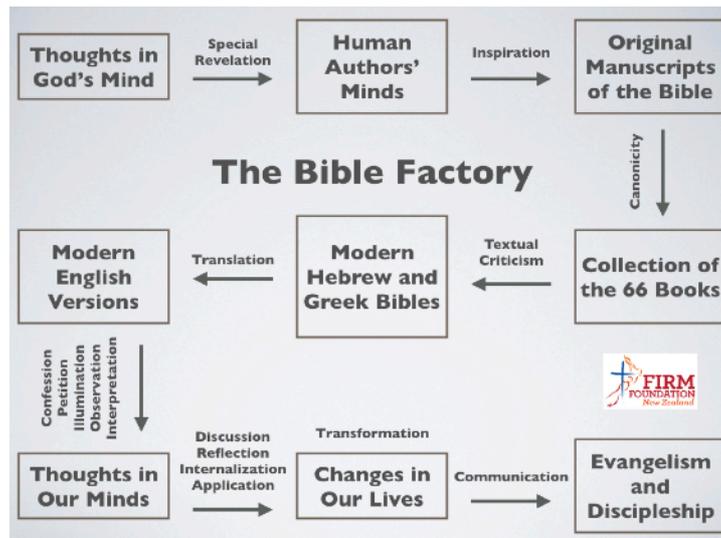
- a. The goals are:
- (1) To understand the Scriptures very well.
- (2) For God's thoughts to become our thoughts.

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<sup>5</sup> Erasmus, *Preface to New Testament*, quoted in Will Durant, *The Reformation*, 285.

<sup>6</sup> Dr. David L. Cooper.

<sup>7</sup> Kay Arthur, *Lord, Teach Me to Study the Bible in 28 Days*, 45.



## 5. The Attitude of Inductive Bible Study.

- a. Diligence, patience, perseverance, self-discipline.
  - (1) "The Bible is not a child's storybook; rather it is great literature that requires thoughtful response. All its diamonds do not lie exposed on the surface. Its richness is mined only through hard intellectual and spiritual spadework."<sup>8</sup>
- b. Inquisitiveness, objectivity, open-mindedness.
  - (1) We must be willing to go where the biblical evidence leads.
    - (a) "The distinctiveness of inductive Bible study involves its radical openness to the meaning of the biblical text wherever the evidence may lead..."
    - (2) When dots on a graph don't fit the current paradigm, the paradigm must shift.
    - (3) Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.
- c. Humility, teachability.
  - (1) "Do not come to the Bible full of your own ideas, and seeking from it a confirmation of them. Come rather to find out what are God's ideas as He has revealed them there. Come not to find a confirmation of your own opinion, but to be taught what God may be pleased to teach. If a man comes to the Bible just to find his notions taught there, he will find them; but if he comes, recognising his own ignorance, just as a little child, to be taught, he will find something infinitely better than his own notions—even the mind of God. We see why it is that many persons cannot see things which are plainly taught in the Bible. The doctrine taught is not their notion, of which they are so full that there is no room left for that which the Bible actually teaches."<sup>9</sup>
- d. Community, discussion, interaction, teamwork.

## 6. The Steps of Inductive Bible Study.

- a. Observation: what does it say?
  - (1) Careful observation is the foundation for accurate interpretation.
  - (2) The more we observe the text, the more our interpretation falls into place.

<sup>8</sup> H. W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, Kindle ed. (Baker Publishing Group).

<sup>9</sup> R. A. Torrey, *How to Study the Bible*.

- b. Interpretation: what does it mean?
- c. Application: how then do we live?
  - (1) Accurate application depends on and accurate observation and interpretation.
  - (2) Application is not always doing something. Sometimes it is simply believing what you read.

## 7. The History of Inductive Bible Study.

- a. Alcuin (d. 804).
  - (1) Wanted to educate all in Charlemagne's empire so they could read the Bible.
  - (2) Where Christianity goes, so goes education for everyone.
- b. Francis Bacon (d. 1626).
  - (1) Was a philosopher and statesman who served as Lord Chancellor of England.
  - (2) Developed the scientific method and influenced the scientific revolution.
  - (3) Championed inductive reasoning and careful observation of nature.
  - (4) Developed a system for cataloging books into three categories—history, poetry, and philosophy.
  - (5) Quotes:
    - (a) “The syllogism consists of propositions, propositions consist of words, words are symbols of notions. Therefore if the notions themselves (which is the root of the matter) are confused and over-hastily abstracted from the facts, there can be no firmness in the superstructure. Our only hope therefore lies in a true induction.”<sup>10</sup>
    - (b) “There are and can be only two ways of searching into and discovering truth. The one flies from the senses and particulars to the most general axioms, and from these principles, the truth of which it takes for settled and immovable, proceeds to judgment and to the discovery of middle axioms. And this way is now in fashion. The other derives axioms from the senses and particulars, rising by a gradual and unbroken ascent, so that it arrives at the most general axioms last of all. This is the true way, but as yet untried.”<sup>11</sup>
    - (c) “The understanding left to itself takes the same course (namely, the former) which it takes in accordance with logical order. For the mind longs to spring up to positions of higher generality, that it may find rest there; and so after a little while wearies of experiment. But this evil is increased by logic, because of the order and solemnity of its disputations.”<sup>12</sup>
    - (d) “Both ways set out from the senses and particulars, and rest in the highest generalities; but the difference between them is infinite. For the one just glances at experiment and particulars in passing, the other dwells duly and orderly among them. The one, again, begins at once by establishing certain abstract and useless generalities, the other rises by gradual steps to that which is prior and better known in the order of nature.”<sup>13</sup>

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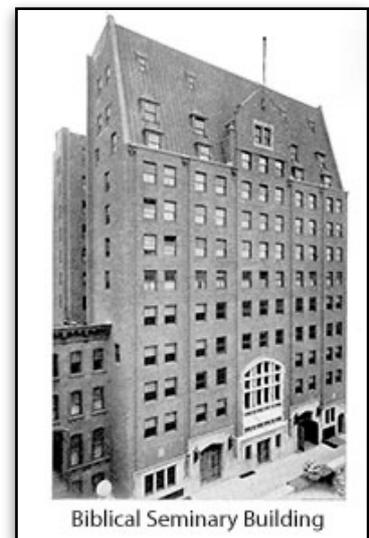
<sup>10</sup> F. Bacon (d. 1626), *The New Organon* (1857), Aphorism XIV.

<sup>11</sup> F. Bacon (d. 1626), *The New Organon* (1857), Aphorism XIX.

<sup>12</sup> F. Bacon (d. 1626), *The New Organon* (1857), Aphorism XX.

<sup>13</sup> F. Bacon (d. 1626), *The New Organon* (1857), Aphorism XXII.

- c. R. A. Torrey (d. 1928).
- (1) Wrote *How to Study the Bible with Greatest Profit* in 1896.
  - (2) Urged use of the Baconian method of inductive reasoning to study the Bible.<sup>14</sup>
  - (3) Would state a category, list the relevant Scriptures, draw propositions from them, and comment on the significance of those propositions.<sup>15</sup>
  - (4) Dealt only with doctrines clearly revealed in the Scripture.<sup>16</sup>
  - (5) “I will follow the Bible wherever it leads me.”<sup>17</sup>
- d. Wilbert Webster White (d. 1944).
- (1) Founded The Biblical Seminary in New York in 1900. Its goal was to “make the study of the Bible in the mother tongue the organising, dominating element in a school of preparation for Christian leadership.”<sup>18</sup>
  - (2) “[T]he ministry must be a bibliocracy, that it must know its Bible better than any other book.”<sup>19</sup>
  - (3) The Biblical Seminary of New York:
    - (a) Charted a course avoiding the fundamentalism of inerrancy and the fundamentalism of higher-critical dogma.
    - (b) Emphasised that Scripture itself must be allowed to establish its own criteria both as to its interpretation and its authority.
    - (c) Was committed to: (1) a biblio-centric curriculum around the inductive study of the Bible in the vernacular; (2) concern for effective educational principles and practices; (3) commitment to the devotional life of prayer toward spiritual maturity; (4) a cosmopolitan, global perspective; and (5) commitment to the authority of the Scriptures.
- e. Herman Harrell Horne (d. 1946).<sup>20</sup>
- (1) Was an American philosopher and educator.
  - (2) Was a leading spokesman for philosophical idealism in educational theory and practice.
  - (3) Advocated a spiritual and religious approach to education.
  - (4) Vigorously opposed John Dewey and progressive education.
- f. Howard Tillman Kuist.
- g. Robert A. Traina (d. 2010).
- (1) *Methodical Bible Study* (1952).



<sup>14</sup> R. Martin, *R. A. Torrey*, 38.

<sup>15</sup> R. Martin, *R. A. Torrey*, 120.

<sup>16</sup> R. Martin, *R. A. Torrey*, 120.

<sup>17</sup> R. A. Torrey, quoted in R. Martin, *R. A. Torrey*, 61.

<sup>18</sup> C. R. Eberhardt, *The Bible in the Making of Ministers* (New York: Association, 1949).

<sup>19</sup> C. R. Eberhardt, *The Bible in the Making of Ministers* (New York: Association, 1949).

<sup>20</sup> See <https://www.biola.edu/talbot/ce20/database/herman-harrell-horne>.

- h. Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society*.
- i. Lewis Sperry Chafer (d. 1952).
- j. Howard Hendricks (d. 2013)
  - (1) *Living by the Book* (2007).
- k. Oletta Wald.
  - (1) *The New Joy of Discovery in Bible Study* (2002).
- l. Irving L. Jensen.
  - (1) *Independent Bible Study*, 2nd ed. (1992).
  - (2) *Do-It-Yourself Bible Studies*.
- m. Kay Arthur.
  - (1) In 1969, Jack and Kay Arthur left the mission field in Mexico due to Kay's health and returned to Chattanooga, Tennessee.
  - (2) They began a youth ministry on a 32-acre farm called Reach Out Ranch. Adults began asking for the same type of ministry.
  - (3) They moved to Atlanta, and a group of 250 women asked Kay to train them how to study the Bible. She wrote the first draft of *How to Study Your Bible* in 1974.
  - (4) The first course she wrote, Romans, included daily homework, a weekly one-hour discussion, and a follow-up lecture.
  - (5) Over the years, curriculum for adults, youth, and children has been developed (Precept Upon Precept, In & Out, Lord series, NISB, NISS, 40-Minute series, IBSC, Transform Student Ministries, and D4Y).
  - (6) Precept Ministries New Zealand was established in 1990.
- n. Mia and Costel Oglice and Vasile Filat.
- o. Several Bible colleges/ministries adhere to inductive Bible study:
  - (1) Asbury Theological Seminary, *The Journal of Inductive Biblical Studies* (<https://place.asburyseminary.edu/jibs/>).
  - (2) Azusa Pacific University.
  - (3) Biola University.
  - (4) Dallas Theological Seminary.
  - (5) Fuller Theological Seminary.
  - (6) Princeton Theological Seminary.
  - (7) InterVarsity Christian Fellowship.
  - (8) Youth With a Mission.

## 8. The Benefits of Inductive Bible Study.

- a. Ability to rightly handle God's truth.
  - (1) **2 Ti 2:15** 15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.
  - (2) **2 Pe 3:16** 16 There are some things in [Paul's letters] that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.
- b. Transforms our minds.
  - (1) **Is 55:11** 11 So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth. It shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

- (2) **Ro 12:2** 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the desire of God, what is good, acceptable, and perfect.
- c. Deals with our doubts.
  - (1) “Suspensions or doubts regarding the Bible can be adequately addressed by the direct literary study of the Bible. As the student encounters the message of the Bible by examining the Bible book-by-book, the student experiences the compelling force and authenticity of the Bible. In the process of pursuing its proper study readers find that the Bible authenticates itself.”
- d. Wisdom and discernment.
  - (1) **Col 1:9-12** 9 We [Paul and Timothy] have not ceased to pray for you [the Colossian church], asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of [God’s] desire in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord [Jesus], fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.
  - (2) Knowledge, then understanding, then wisdom.
  - (3) This follows the classical model of learning: grammar, dialectic, rhetoric.
- e. Equipped for every good work.
  - (1) **2 Ti 3:16-17** 16 All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete (ἄριστος), equipped for every good work.
- f. Confidence to share our faith.
- g. Leadership development.
  - (1) **Ezr 7:10** 10 Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of Yahweh, to do it, and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.
  - (2) Ex.: Youth Bible Study on Friday evenings.
- h. Sanctification and spiritual maturity.
  - (1) **Jn 17:17** 17 Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth.
- i. Blessing.
  - (1) **Ps 1:1-3** 1 Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers. 2 But his delight is in the law of Yahweh, and on his law he meditates day and night. 3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

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Robert Traina, *Inductive Bible Study* ([https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLIcLs-D03SrW5xKX2R\\_byjhX4DSKnWIyJ](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLIcLs-D03SrW5xKX2R_byjhX4DSKnWIyJ)).

*Notes*