Inductive Bible Study Methodology

“Inductive Bible Study is an approach to inquiry in which people learn by examining the objects of the study themselves and drawing their own conclusions about these materials form a direct encounter with the Scriptures” (Thompson, p. 12).

I. What are the Basic Questions?
   • Question #1: OBSERVATION: “What did the original author intent when writing the book?”
     b. Remember that the bible was written to specific Readers, with the Holy Spirit knowing we would be reading in the future.
   • We must Look before we Leap! This is the first step in studying the Bible.
     a. Look at what the author actually wrote before you leap to interpret or apply. See what is really there.
   • Question #2: INTERPRETATION: What was the meaning of the book when written?
     a. Seeking to understand what they meant!
   • Question #3: APPLICATION: “What does is have to do with us in our own world?”
     a. The Bible relates to us in our daily life.
     b. The Bible acknowledges that different Scripture passages inform contemporary Christian readers in different ways.
     c. The Bible isn’t something that you study for academic purposes, but for us to act upon in response to the Scriptures.

Step One: Observation--Look Before You Leap!

I. Observation: Look before you Leap!
   A. “What is the primary material in the book as a whole?”
      Type of Literature:
      - Narrative: Genesis
      - Prophetic: Major & Minor Prophets
      - Apocalyptic: Daniel, Ezekiel, Revelation
      “How are the books materials arranged?”
      - Biographical (persons): Gospels
      - Historical (Events): Joshua and Judges
      - Chronological (time): I & II Kings
      - Ideological (ideas): Romans, Ephesians, Galatians
      - Geographical (places): Exodus, Acts
   B. Study In Units!
      1. Begin with a wide angle lens to get the big picture and see the whole. Then use a close-up lens to look carefully at the parts.
      2. Old Testament Units:
C.  See what is there!  Context is Everything!

II.  Observation: See what is There:  The Content
1.  Survey the Unit. Read the book or set of chapters through quickly to get an overview.
2.  Give titles to chapters, paragraphs, and other subunits.
   Give short descriptive titles to each chapter and paragraph--it will help you remember.
3.  Note the tone and Atmosphere of the passage.
4.  Observe the types of literature and materials (genre)
5.  Make a chart and outline the passage.

Example: Jonah: Running from God’s Mercy (Book as a whole)
1.  Jonah runs from God 1:1-16
2.  Jonah Prays from the fish 1:17-2:10
3.  Nineveh repents, God relents 3:1-10
4.  Jonah angry at God’s mercy 4:1-11

III.  Observations:  Looking for Relationships!
A.  Learn the basic structural relationships
1.  Cause and Effect (Romans 1:16)
2.  Climax (Gospel accounts: Hosea 14-judgement)
3.  Comparison (“like” or “as”; Hosea use of Gomer and Israel).
4.  Contrast (A vs. B; “however”, or “but”; Jn. 3:16)
5. Cruciality (the pivot; David sins with Bathsheba, II Sam. 11:27b...from this point on a decline).
6. Question-Answer (problem/solution; Romans 6:1 & 16a)
7. Recurrence or Repetitions (Judges, Matthew).

**Step Two: Interpretation**

Once you have made observations of the text you move to interpret what these observations mean.

I. Ask Questions to find answers!
   a. Definitional Questions: What does this (term, phrase, item) mean? What is the significance of this (term, phrase, item)?
   b. Questions of Reason: What is the purpose of this observation?
   c. Implicational Questions: What are the implications? What is being implied?
   d. Place and Time: Where is this located? What is the arrangement in the book as a whole?

II. Find Answers (Interpretation):
   1. Meaning of Major Terms: Example Jonah 4, what does the terms “pity,” “anger,” and “compassion” mean?
      a. Use Concordance to Search Word Usage
      b. How is this word used in other parts of Scriptures?
   2. Historical/Cultural Background: What was the setting when the author wrote this passage?
      a. Consult Bible dictionaries, encyclopedias, and handbooks.
      b. Consult Commentaries
   3. Consult Other Interpretations of the Passage (Last Step in Process).
   4. Listen to the Bible as a Whole. Does the truth gained correspond to the Biblical foundation of Scripture?
   5. Spiritual Discernment to interpret passage correctly. Does the interpretation represent and correspond to the life of Jesus as seen in the New Testament?

**Step 3: Application**

- How does the meaning of the passage apply to your life?
- What aspects of the passage are relevant or not relevant to our culture?
- In what ways do I need to change in light of the revelation of Scripture?
- What are the implications of this new truth learned?

References: