



Bible Study Methods

Part 015 - Introduction to the Inductive Bible Study Method

LETTING THE BIBLE TEACH US

INTRODUCTION

The Bible is the most important book ever written. It claims to be the very words of the almighty, infinite God, given to reveal Himself to finite man. That is a huge claim and one we need to take seriously as Christians.

The Bible is indispensable to our Christian life and ministry.

Since we believe that the Bible was given to us by God for our instruction, we need to approach it carefully and handle it accurately.

(2TI 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.

The divine nature of the Scriptures demands that we read it with the intent of learning from it, rather than making it say what we want to hear.

How can we be sure we rightly understand the Word?

The inductive Bible study method is designed to help every believer—whether layman or pastor—better understand the teaching of the Word of God.

This lesson will introduce this simple and effective method, and following lessons will describe each step in more detail.

But first - let's look at where this word comes from. Where did we get it?

HOW WE RECEIVED THE BIBLE

The Lord has acted, and still acts to bring a reliable Bible to us. This process began with the original authors, and continues when we open His Word today. There are several stages to this process.

A. Inspiration

The term inspiration literally means God "breathed" or "breathed out," and affirms that the Bible is the product of the living God

(2Ti 3:16)

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

B. Preservation

From the beginning, the unique nature of the Bible was understood.

Faithful men have always exercised great care in accurately copying the biblical text. They made very few errors, and the massive number of manuscripts discovered has enabled us to find and fix mistakes that were made.

C. Canonisation

The term 'canon' is borrowed from a Greek word that means rule or standard.

The Canon has been used by Christians since the 4th century to identify an authoritative list of books belonging to the Old or New Testament by which all other books were measured.

Many early church fathers and church councils contributed to the task of canonisation, with God's help.

D. Translation

Godly men have laboured so that each person might hear the Word in his own language. The task is huge, and ongoing.

E. Illumination

As the Christian reads, studies, and meditates on the Word, the Holy Spirit reveals the meaning to him.

I. INDUCTIVE VS. DEDUCTIVE

Deduction and induction are two kinds of logic or reasoning. Both deal with the general and the specific.

They are both methods of arriving at a conclusion. However, they do so in exactly the opposite manner.

A. The Deductive Approach

Deductive reasoning is used by people in wide variety of professions.

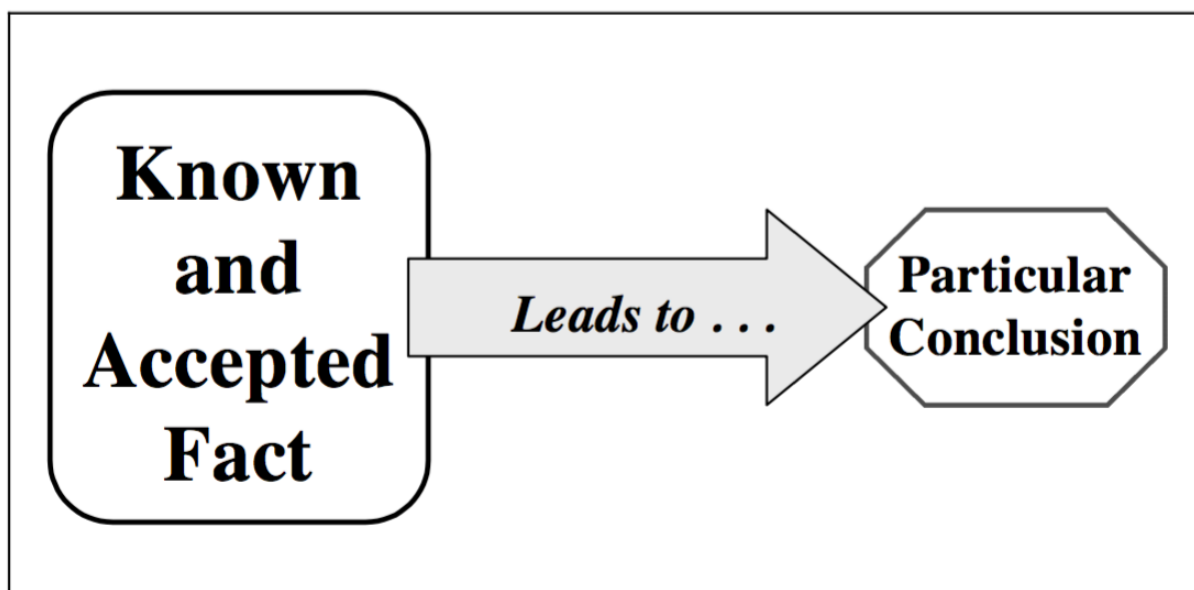
Deduction is a valuable skill, and many books have been written on the subject. The intent of this lesson is not to minimise the validity of deduction, but to suggest that it is an inferior method of Bible study.

1. DEDUCTIVE REASONING

In general, deductive reasoning moves from the general to the specific. That is, it starts with a known and accepted idea or premise.

That pre-existing understanding is then compared to a particular situation, and a conclusion is formed.

Figure 1.1 Deductive Reasoning



Deduction has a major weakness.

If our general understanding is wrong, so will be our conclusion.

For example, suppose a Russian hears someone talk about a doctor. In Russia, most doctors are women. Therefore, it would be logical for him to deduce that the doctor is a woman. Often, however, he will be wrong.

There are also male doctors in Russia, and in some countries most doctors are men. In this case, the influence of our prior experience can often lead us in the wrong direction.

We assume we know the answer, rather than continuing to look for other clues to the correct answer.

2. DEDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

The deductive method can be used to study the Bible, but its weakness limits its usefulness. When we study the Bible, it is important to understand what God is saying, rather than to impose our understanding on the text.

3. THE “NORMAL” METHOD

Unfortunately, deduction is probably the most common method of Bible study. As a result, few learn very much from the Bible. Instead they often find ways to read the bible that support what they thought in the first place.

B. The Inductive Approach

The inductive method is in many ways the opposite of the deductive method.

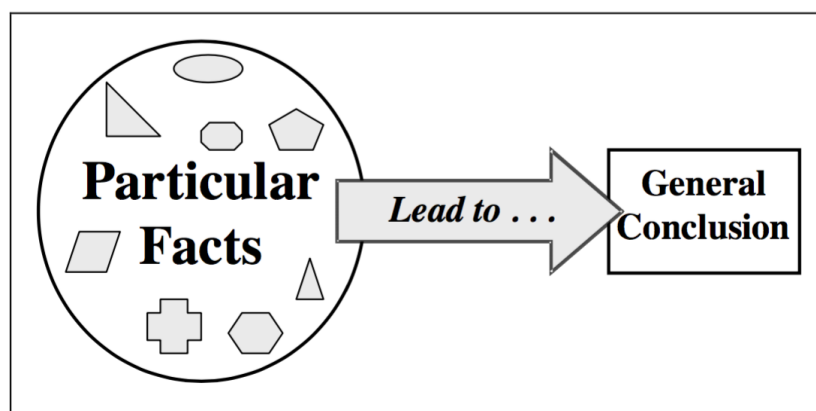
It examines the particulars of a situation, and then attempts to form a general principle from them. It is normally used in those situations where we do not have a general principle that seems to fit, and are therefore unable to use deduction.

1. INDUCTIVE REASONING

Deduction is essentially the process of using our pre-existing knowledge.

Induction, by contrast, is about learning.

Figure 1.2 The Inductive Method



2. INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

When we use the inductive method to study the Bible, we come to the Scripture as learners.

We acknowledge to God and to ourselves that we do not yet know all the answers. Our purpose is to gain understanding.

3. A BETTER METHOD

The inductive method is superior to the deductive method because it makes the Scriptures the authority, rather than our understanding.

The process of the inductive Bible study method is therefore:

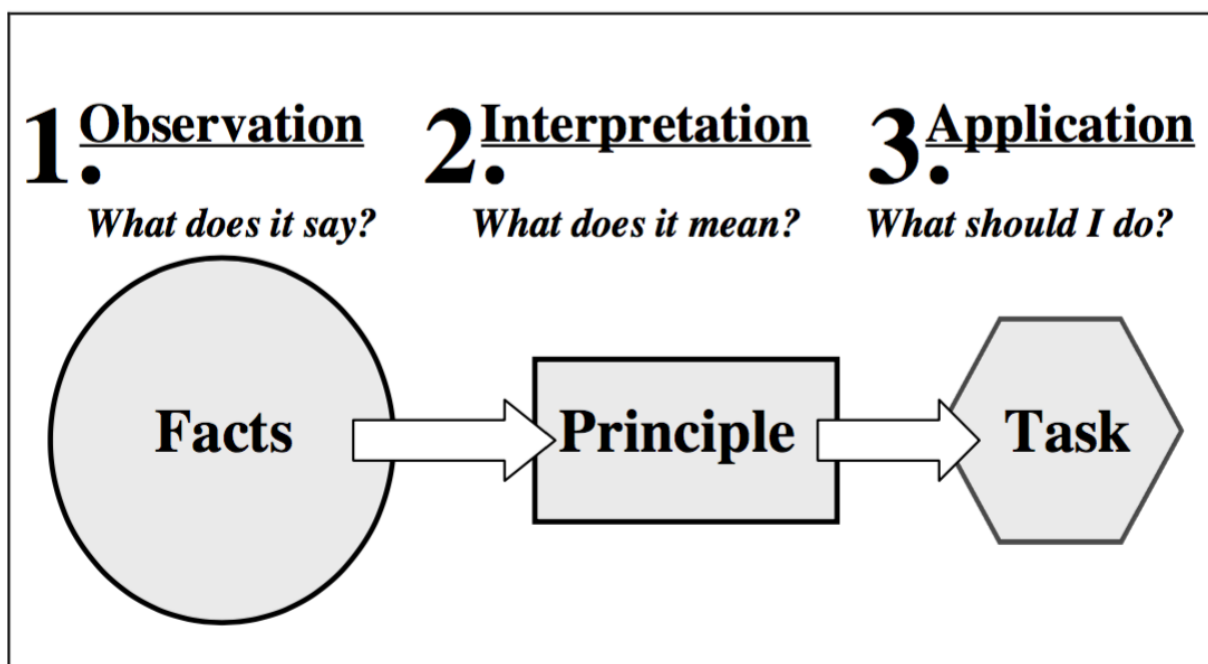
- **Observation** of the facts in the Scriptural context.
- **Interpretation** to find the principle that the passage teaches.
- **Application** of the principle to equivalent situations in our lives.

II. STEPS OF INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

The three steps of the inductive Bible study method are each important. They build progressively on each other to lead us from the Bible text to a correct application to our lives. Essentially, the three steps ask three different questions about the text.

- What does it say? [**Observation**]
- What does it mean? [**Interpretation**]
- What should I do? [**Application**]

Figure 1.3 The Three Steps



A. Observation – What Does It Say?

B. Interpretation – What Does It Mean?

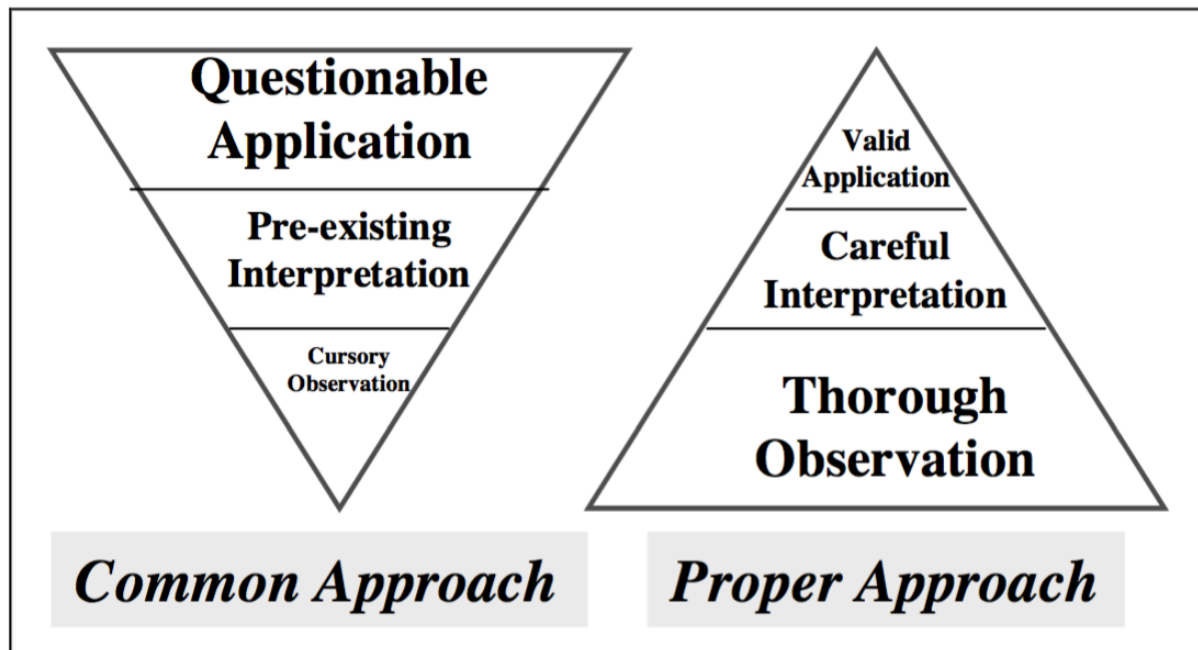
C. Application – What Should I Do?

III. BUILDING A SOLID PYRAMID

A. Rushing the Process

The most common mistake in using the inductive method is to spend too little time on the observation phase.

Figure 1.4 Good and Bad Foundations



B. A Solid Foundation

The pyramid in the right side of Figure 1.4 demonstrates the proper use of the inductive method. Notice that observation is the largest section, followed by interpretation, and that application is the smallest.

The inductive method can be compared to mining for gold:

FIRST, TONS OF GOLD-BEARING ROCKS ARE CRUSHED INTO MANAGEABLE PIECES AND WASHED (OBSERVATION).

NEXT, THE CRUSH ROCK IS SIFTED TO FIND THE GOLD NUGGETS (INTERPRETATION).

FINALLY, THE GOLD NUGGETS ARE MELTED DOWN AND SHAPED INTO USEABLE JEWELLERY OF OTHER OBJECTS FOR THE CONSUMER (APPLICATION).

THE PROCESS PRODUCES ONLY A SMALL AMOUNT OF GOLD COMPARED TO THE WEIGHT OF THE ORIGINAL ROCK. HOWEVER, THE RESULT IS OF GREAT VALUE. IN THE SAME WAY, THE RESULT OF STUDYING THE WORD USING THE INDUCTIVE METHOD IS WORTH ALL THE EFFORT REQUIRED.

CONCLUSION

The inductive Bible study method is a superior method of studying the Word. It leads to a more accurate understanding of the Bible, and promotes true spiritual growth and learning.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the basic difference between deduction and induction?
2. Why is the inductive method a superior method of studying the Bible, compared to the deductive method?

3. What are the dangers of the “common” approach to Bible study and preaching?

ACTION PLAN

When you next study the Bible, record how much time you spend on observation, interpretation, and application. On the basis of these times, evaluate whether you are using the inductive method, the deductive, or something in between.

In preparation for the next lesson on observation, pick a sample short passage of Scripture to study (no more than a paragraph or so). Spend at least two hours prayerfully observing the passage and asking God to open your eyes to things that you have not yet seen. Record your observations. What did you learn?