

Inductive Manuscript Study



Inductive studies in any field begin with the data and from that draw conclusions.

Inductive Bible Study begins with a careful examination of the text. Then, the reader jots down questions to clarify what the text means. Once the text is understood, the reader tries to summarize what the author intended to communicate. Then, the reader considers what ideas, principles, attitudes, actions et cetera demonstrated in the text might be applicable today.

When you pick up a Bible, some inductive work has been done for you. For example, when you write a letter, you don't add verse and chapter numbers. Neither did the Biblical writers. A scholar has read the text and decided where ideas change and we would put a paragraph break and where there are major idea shifts, so they put headings to help us make the shift. These are very helpful, but sometimes we start to read the text in verses instead of like a letter.

Manuscript study takes out all the formatting and numbering so that we have to focus on the text. To help us find our place, there are numbers on the left column. So we say Page 1 Line 7 (P1 L7) to find our place. There are also large margins and wide spaces between lines to allow you to write on your manuscript.

What do you write?



150 miles

Observations:

Lots of people use colored pencils or different symbols to mark similar things. Eg. Geographic items might be marked in green. Sometimes I write the places in the upper right corner. I use a triangle with a T in it to mark passages with the whole trinity indicated.

Things to mark: Places, time indicators/verb tenses, characters, repeated words or ideas

Jot on the side: What is going on? Where is the story happening? Just how far are the distances mentioned? What difference does this make if any? Are there any cultural customs or historical events to look up? Is there a key image portrayed?

Who is doing what? In Acts this is particularly important. What does the text say that the apostles or disciples are doing? What does the text say that God – Father, Son, and/or Holy Spirit are doing? What does the text say other people are doing?

Questions

What questions are raised by your observations – not so much interpretation or application type questions, but understanding the text questions. How did they celebrate Sha'vot? What is the significance of the holiday? How does that relate to the text? Just where is Damascus? How far is that from Jerusalem? Study Bibles, cultural customs books, Bible dictionaries and can help answer these questions.



Interpretation

Now that you've gathered lots of information, we try to summarize what the author is trying to communicate through the text.

Application

Without spiritualizing or allegorizing, are there ideas or principles or attitudes et cetera in the text that might apply to me, today?

Does the main point of the text challenge me to change my thinking or my behavior? What are some concrete steps I can take toward this change?

Are there any principles that are relevant today? Eg generosity, honoring God, repenting... How am I and/or can I apply those principles in my life?

How will the text change how I relate to God, myself, my family, my friends, my co-workers...?