

What is Inductive Bible Study

by Tony Warren

in·duc·tive, in·duk'tiv, v.t. [L. *induco, inductum*.] out of; inducing principles; to introduce from; to initiate; *logic*: in inferring conclusions or principles from facts; the act of reasoning based on evidence in facts, to come to logical conclusions; the act of persuasion by inference from particulars; Diverse from deductive reasoning in that it doesn't begin with an hypothesis, but starts with specifics rather than premise.

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o some degree, what you are told inductive Bible study means will depend upon which Theologian you are asking. From a theological standpoint, it is a term of logic that fundamentally means *interpreting Scripture with no pre-judgment, from the text itself, through analyzing the evidence and drawing from it logical conclusions*. Biblical Induction literally means 'out of,' or introduced "from" the Bible. The Bible being the source of specifics from which the general evidence (and thus doctrine) is derived.

Though not known by this title, this is how 'faithful' Christians have gleaned truth from the Scriptures since Bible study began. For it is by God's use of repeated examples in Scripture that He illustrates to His servants its true interpretation, that they may (*by comparing Scripture with Scripture*) come to sound conclusions based upon those received Biblical examples. By the Spirit, using inductive reasoning from the Word, we can and should come to consistently defensible and trustworthy interpretations. Though many unbelievers and some professing Christians claim that the Bible is perplexing, it is not so much the Word that is confusing, but more often man who doesn't rightly divide it ([2nd Timothy 2:15](#)), or righteously judge the very Word that he is reading. This is most often because of his own sinful nature that inevitably hardens his heart to distasteful or difficult doctrines, that he won't understand them.

1st Corinthians 14:31-33

- "For ye may all prophesy one by one, *that all may learn, and all may be comforted.*
- And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.

- For ***God is not the author of confusion***, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints."

God is not the author of confusion, therefore, let no man claim that the Scriptures are so complicated that man cannot know for sure what they teach. The Bible can be understood by man because God is not the author of uncertainty, disorder or chaos for His servants. The true believer has the Spirit of Christ dwelling within him so that he works ([2nd Timothy 2:15](#)) that he will be guided into truth. The Bible is the only book whose Author is always present when it is read. With careful study, through His Spirit, we are spiritually guided into truth. This is often expedited through a sound hermeneutic or system of inductive reasoning.

Indeed we may reasonably define it as the operation of the mind of Christ in us, by which we are guided through this system, that we infer from that which is known true (*the Word of God*), upon that which to us is an unknown (*what the Scripture means*), in order to come to sound conclusions. That is Biblical induction. And this is how we make very dependable judgments concerning the evidence of Scripture. It is not unlike a court of law where a juror would take in and examine the facts of evidence from a scene, careful to make precise mental notes, that he would come to a righteous conclusion, ***based upon this inductive reasoning derived from that evidence.***

True inductive Bible study never starts with a hypothesis, and it has only one presupposition, which is: '*The Word of God alone is inerrant, authoritative over all ideas, and informative in faith, practice and doctrine. Thus it is the only qualified source of interpretation of Scripture.*' It is no different from the historical church rule that the ultimate authority and source of Biblical interpretation is *Sola Scriptura*. In simple terms, that all truth necessary for understanding the Bible, our salvation and spiritual life is taught either explicitly or implicitly in Scripture. It is the only study of Scripture in true humility, from the unadulterated texts or testimony gleaned from Holy Canon alone. In this manner we uncover the proofs, examine the evidences, and use God given logic and reason wherein the Scriptures will both reveal and interpret themselves. **Genesis 40:8**

- "And they said unto him, We have dreamed a dream, and there is no interpreter of it. And Joseph said unto them, ***Do not interpretations belong to God?*** tell me them, I pray you."

God's servant Joseph knew the truth. In our day (*even as it was then*), interpretations do belong to God rather than man. When we use the inductive system, we take the interpretations 'out of the texts themselves, so that if any interpretation that we hold conflicts with the facts of Scripture, it cannot have been inducted 'from' Scripture. That is how we yield ourselves to a sound, Biblical authoritative exegesis. In this way we are also showing regard for God's reproof of handling Scripture deceitfully ([2nd Corinthians 4:2](#)) or holding to unsound theology. We allow the Scripture itself to be the ultimate arbiter of what is truth. This is the prudent and circumspect nature of the child of God who receives correction from his study. It is the Spirit of humility to receive our father's teachings, rather than invent our own.

Proverbs 15:5

- "A fool despiseth his father's instruction: but he that regardeth reproof is prudent."

Effective Bible study cannot begin with a supposition or a conclusion from which we search the Scriptures (backward) for evidence to support these preconceived views. It must begin with the evidence (forward), which must then be followed meticulously to 'wherever' it leads. Far too many Theologians today are looking through Scripture in order to justify what they already believe, rather than honestly looking to receive what Scripture itself declares. This is the subtle difference between "inductive" and "deductive" studies. Inductive Bible study is superior to deductive study in that (unlike deductive) there is no hypothesizing, supposition, or assuming ahead of time, and no inference by reasoning from the general to the specific. Induction makes sound inferences from the specifics of Scripture through the evidence of Scripture. In other words, from the specific to the general. Or more Biblically succinct, *'from the facts of Scripture, to the conclusion about Scripture, via the collective evidence of Scripture.'*

Part of the logic and rationale in Biblical induction is to find specific consistent examples, and to use them as standards, the criteria, or evidences of law. For example, by Christ being revealed in Scripture as the good Shepherd, we better understand sheep representing those He cares for. Or by poisonous serpent representing those with the power of Satan, we better understand why God's servants are given power that serpents cannot harm them ([Matthew 23:33](#)); [Luke 10:19](#); [Mark 16:18](#)). The understanding of these truths are all based upon Biblical induction, or the gleaning of general truths 'out of' the source, which is the Bible. We are thus learning what is the true God breathed interpretation, by these repeated models or examples found in Scripture.

1st Corinthians 10:9-11

- "Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.
- Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.
- Now all these things happened unto them *for ensamples*: and *they are written for our admonition*, upon whom the ends of the world are come."

Why were these things inspired written of God? Clearly they were examples or models for us, that we could glean from them general knowledge, spiritual truths and interpretations. Here the message is that the serpent (Satan) is the adversary and destroyer that will hurt those who dare to tempt or test the Lord God. By these continued models we are induced or persuaded of the truths incorporated in these Scripture.

Another example can be seen in how Scripture prophesied that a sin bearer would come, and the iniquity of His people would be laid upon Him ([Isaiah 53:2-5](#)). From many Scriptures (all taken as true and compared in harmony with each other), we conclude by the myriad of evidences, that Christ 'was' that sin bearer and that He fulfilled that prophecy of the coming Messiah. We know that this is true not by

hypothesis, guesswork, or conjecture, but by sound inductive Bible study, using Biblical facts as the source, and applying evidences so that Scripture interprets itself. This system will explicitly point to this correct Biblical conclusion. That is inductive reasoning where the truth of interpretation is induced out of the Biblical facts of the Old and New Testament Scriptures. As contrasted with deductive Bible study (which is reading an interpretation into the Bible text by assumption), inductive Study is drawing an interpretation 'out of' the Bible text. Thus it didn't come from you, but from the authoritative Word of God itself. The frame below gives a few simple examples of the process in 'rudimentary' Biblical induction.

Simplistic Inductive Bible Study Illustration

	Facts	Evidences	Conclusion
1.	Only God is without sin	Christ is without sin	Christ is God
2.	Christ called Peter Satan	Satan means Adversary	Christ meant Peter was being adversarial
3.	No Man is justified by his own works	Man is justified by works	Man is justified by the work of Christ in him.

This illustrates the use of Biblical facts and Biblical evidence to come to conclusions consistent with the facts in the 'whole' of God's Word. Of course, the above illustration is overly simplistic, but the more Biblical facts and evidences you add to the equation, the more sure you can be that you have come to God's truth, and not your own personal interpretation. For example, in that first illustration we saw of Christ, we could continue to induce from Scripture that (evidence #2) God is the Alpha and Omega and beside Him there is no other Savior, and (evidence #3) Christ also said that He was Alpha and Omega and was the Savior, and (evidence #4) God said Christ is the Creator of heaven and earth and all that was therein, and (evidence #5) also says that God was the Creator of heaven and earth and all that was made. We could continue evidence after evidence, and by Biblical induction, we see that all of these infallible proofs of law should lead us to the same inescapable conclusion that we saw in that first simplistic illustration. Namely, that Jesus is God.

Of course I say that it *should*, because if any professed Christian is of a mind and spirit not to hear what the Scriptures declare, then their system of interpretation is all a moot point. Nobility or what is simply honesty, is illustrated in that we do not handle the Scriptures deceitfully or with duplicity. This is itself a gift of God, without which no amount of Scripture references are enough to convince anyone of anything that they do not wish to believe.

Acts 17:11-12

- "These were more *noble* than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so.
- Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few."

These were more noble or honest, and that is why they didn't simply hold on to their congregation's traditions and beliefs, but searched the Scripture with an open (*all readiness of*) mind to receive authority of what was written, and thus came to believe.

When Christians ask "*why are there so many different interpretations in the church,*" the answers are often as varied as the churches themselves. There are vain church traditions or habits, there's sloppy exegesis, laziness in reading, etc., but the lack of the Spirit of truth which would lead one to sound conclusions can never be ruled out in many instances. Because without the Spirit working within us, we can pridefully (deceitfully) declare that Scripture to mean anything that is our will to declare.

Jeremiah 17:9

- "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"

Even to the point where we deceive ourselves, because who can know man's heart but God? Satan is the master deceiver not because he comes looking like a Devil, but because He comes appearing as a messenger of light, a minister of righteousness, as a wolf in sheep's clothing. If professing Christians (which can include anyone) do not have the Spirit of Christ, no witness of Scripture will be sufficient to convince them of the truth, even when it seems plainly written. The Word of God can only be truly understood by an inductive Bible study through personal communion with God, through His Spirit. In this communion, the Lord first softens the wicked's hardened heart, preparing it for reception of the Word.

Ezekiel 11:19

- "And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh:"

The simple truth is, every man who professes to be a Christian, is not a true Christian. A true Christian will have the serious intention of actually doing the will of God, with a heart that desires to 'receive' Scripture honestly or nobly, rather than rationalizing it away that he may believe whatever he wants.

What is Inductive Bible Study? The goal is to approach the Scriptures with an earnestness that we not only read it, but are spiritually taught by it. Because if we are simply reading our preconceived ideas into Scripture, or looking for justification of doctrines that we already hold, we are not honestly seeking truth. We are merely seeking justification. True inductive reasoning in Bible study will eliminate this by having the starting point be one where the student confesses that, '*he knows nothing but the Biblical facts, and is willing to be taught out of those facts.*' Then we can get a legitimate God breathed interpretation of Scripture, rather than vainly reading our own personal beliefs and theories into it.

Some Theologians have stated that the Bible is not a book of logic, however I believe that the Bible is the most rational and logical book on the face of the earth. Not in man's definition of logic, science, or rational thinking, but in true understanding of

systemic logic and rational thinking. What is foolishness to man is actually the wisdom of God, and what is the wisdom of man is actually foolishness to God. To unregenerated man the Bible is not the truth, but a book for the simple-minded, naive or those susceptible to gullibility. But the truth is, how could a book be inspired penned by so many different prophets, whose lives were separated by so many hundreds of years, where they have no knowledge of one another, and yet have every word and teaching be in synergy and harmony, in total consistency with every other prophets' words and teachings. Not simply on a doctrine level, but on a Spiritual teaching level that defies human ability? How could such a unique, perfectly ordered and congruous book be without logic or sound reasoning? It makes no sense. To come to such a conclusion would in itself be illogical and irrational. You could have two people holding the same view speak on an issue one day apart, and chances are they will end up contradicting each other in something. Much less written Words and teachings being penned over hundreds of years. Truly, once considered carefully, the Bible testifies of itself that it is true.

Real logic and rational thinking is in understanding that if the Bible is the inspired and infallible Word from the mind of God (a Christian given), then it can only be interpreted by the Words of its author, God. This is the 'key' to understanding holy Canon, because the true author is not man.

Isaiah 55:8-9

- "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.
- For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Our thinking is not God's thinking, nor our interpretations God's interpretations. So although methods of inductive Bible study come in a variety of flavors and styles depending upon the Theologian, one thing remains constant. The most basic principle of inductive Bible Study is that the Scripture alone is the source, and it is harmonious and inerrant. For the test of any sound exegesis is its order of invariables that bring about a systemic and consistent hermeneutic. All grounded in our only presupposition based upon empirical evidence, which is that Scripture alone is source and ultimate interpreter.

1. Secular history (*no matter how allegedly trustworthy*) can neither define nor interpret Scripture. Scripture in fact both defines and interprets history. Secular history and the presuppositions therein, must be subordinate to Scripture.
2. The Bible (thee inspired Word of God) is the final arbiter for Christian doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. Man's ideas, whether scientific, historical, or archaeological, must in all areas be subject to the word of God.
3. Rightly dividing the word means cutting or portioning it correctly, taking things both in context, and by the examples shown in comparing Scripture with Scripture. It is by the use of Biblical precepts and models that we discern what God means by any given passage.

4. Besides being its own interpreter, the Bible, compared with itself, can be used as its own dictionary. Words can be defined by searching through the Scripture to see how God uses the same words in other passages. With prayer and supplication seeking wisdom and understanding, we can often set forth the meaning by the use and context.
5. The Holy Spirit is the true teacher of what Scripture means, and by Grace of God it works within us to humility, and moves us to surrender to its authority. It is by this working that we 'receive' what God has inspired written, and are persuaded to look honestly at not only Scripture, but ourselves.
6. Our conclusions are induced only from the Biblical facts and evidences of what we find in Scripture. Never by politics, culture, traditions habit, nations, church leaders or other outside influences.
7. There is often a deeper spiritual meaning to Scripture underlying the literal, which is only discerned by a careful and measured exegesis. A thorough examination of like-examples, in context, is a good sound basis for coming to correct conclusions concerning spiritual with spiritual.

This is all by process of a sound inductive Bible Study. It is in this way that we (from the specific facts) interpret the Scriptures righteously, with sound judgment. In other words, rightly dividing, cutting or portioning it justly/righteously.

2nd Timothy 2:15

- "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

Rightly dividing means justly portioning or allocating it correctly. Just as one would cut a pie in equal slices that everyone receive a 'just' cut. In other words, honestly judging by comparing piece with piece. These are things that the willful sinner will not do because he lusts/desires to do his 'own' will, rather than the will of God. This is because he does not have the Spirit of God to receive honestly the Word of truth.

1st Corinthians 2:12-14

- "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.
- Which things also we speak, *not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.*
- But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

Logic, science, knowledge, wisdom and reason, but not as man defines it (*which is foolishness to God*), but as God defines it. By careful exegesis or a sound study of Scripture, comparing that which is spiritual by that which is spiritual, we come to understand as God desires. Something that the natural man of himself simply cannot do.

In closing, let me say that there are many contemporary Theologians today who are

purporting inductive Bible study, but who lean toward the secular historical, experiential, or the emotional rather than a textual analysis. I do not shrink from declaring that "this is folly." We must never give way to experience, secular history, science, archeology, or the self serving attempts of modernist Theologians to place themselves into the shoes of the Biblical participants in order to glean what they were thinking (*as if we could*). The fact is, they didn't 'think' the Scriptures, God did. We must instead follow the text religiously and without outside influences that lead to deviations from doctrine and divine understanding. It is this solid Biblical analysis of text that characterizes sound inductive Bible study. The key word here being '*sound*,' because anyone can claim to study the Bible in an inductive fashion, but the proof is in the examples and evidences presented.

What is inductive Bible Study? Simply, when we study Biblically, we take in or glean solid evidence from the Scripture (the specific source), that we then have legitimate basis to come to Biblical truth. In other words, conclusions based upon our study and observations of the evidences and laws. This is the only real way to come to truth and has been done for years without the fancy name of an 'inductive Bible Study.' The true strength of this methodology is that it interprets the Bible not by man's idea of what it means (*horses, jews, mountains, kings*), but by the Biblical evidence. It is a vehicle to help Christians to both grow in Grace, and to uncover the ultimate meaning of difficult texts for themselves. In doing so, it inherently shows the foolishness of depending upon church leaders, pastors, teachers, or any man for absolute truth. The Bible is the written evidence that interpretations indeed do belong to God.

We pray that the Lord who is rich in mercy and Gracious above all, guide you into the magnificent truths of His Holy Word.

Amen!

Peace,

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Created 10/17/02 / Last Modified 8/04/14

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