Inductive
BIBLE
STUDY

A Comprehensive Guide to the
Practice of Hermeneutics

David R. Bauer
Robert A. Traina

Foreword by Eugene H. Peterson

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This book is dedicated to the memories of
Wilbert Webster White and Howard Tillman Kuist,
pioneers, teachers, interpreters,
men who loved God and God's Word

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Foreword

Fifty-six years ago I drove into New York City, negotiated my way through the traffic of midtown Manhattan, and enrolled in a seminary on East 49th Street. Later that week I sat in a classroom led by a professor who over the next three years would profoundly change my perception of the Bible, and me with it, in ways that gave shape to everything I have been doing for the rest of my life. This is not an exaggeration.

A couple of years before I entered his classroom, Professor Traina had written the book *Methodical Bible Study*, which was used throughout the seminary as a text. The book that you hold in your hands, *Inductive Bible Study*, is an expansion of that early text by Professor Traina and his colleague Professor Bauer. As I read this sequel, memories of my first reading come alive again. I am giving witness to that early but never-diminishing delight.

I grew up in a Christian home and from an early age was familiar with the Bible. I read it daily, memorized it, and on entering into adolescence argued with my friends over it. But quite frankly, I wasn't really fond of it. I knew it was important, knew it was "God's Word." To tell the truth, I was bored with it. More often than not, it was a field of contention, providing material for "truths" that were contested by warring factions. Or it was reduced to rules and principles that promised to keep me out of moral mud puddles. Or—and this was worst of all—it was flattened into clichés and slogans and sentimental God-talk, intended to inspire and motivate.

It only took three or four weeks in Professor Traina's classroom for me to become aware of a seismic change beginning to take place within me regarding the Bible. Until now I and all the people with whom I associated had treated the Bible as something to be *used*—used as a textbook with information about God, used as a handbook to lead people to salvation, used as a weapon to defeat the devil and all his angels, used as an antidepressant. Now incrementally,

week by week, semester by semester, my reading of the Bible was becoming a conversation. I was no longer reading words—I was listening to voices; I was observing how these words worked in association with all the other words on the page. And I was learning to listen carefully to these voices, these writers who were, well, *writers*. Skilled writers, poets, and storytellers who were artists of language. Isaiah and David were poets. Matthew and Luke were masters of the art of narrative. Words were not just words: words were holy.

I employ the term *seismic* to describe what I was experiencing. Here is another term for what happened: *paradigm shift*—a totally different way to look at and interpret and respond to what I have been looking at all my life. Like the paradigm shift from Ptolemy to Copernicus. The shift from the world of Ptolemy to the world of Copernicus totally changed the way we understand the cosmos. Ptolemy told us that the sun revolved around the earth, and that made perfect sense for a long time. Copernicus told us that the earth revolved around the sun, and suddenly we were "seeing" things, the same things that we had been seeing all along, but now in a far more accurate and comprehensive way.

When I entered Professor Traina's classroom, I had a Ptolemaic understanding of the Bible: I was the center (my will, my questions, my needs) around which the Bible turned. After three years in that classroom, I was a thoroughgoing Copernican: the Bible was the center (God's will, Christ's questions, the Spirit's gifts) around which I turned.

The experience was not merely academic. The passion and patience that permeated that classroom instilled in me an inductive imagination: fiercely attentive to everything that is there and only what is there, alert to relationships both literary and personal, habitually aware of context—the entire world of creation and salvation that is being revealed in this Bible. And always the insistence that I do this firsthand, not filtered through the hearsay of others or the findings of experts. His faculty colleagues shared the work, but it was Professor Traina's intensity and comprehensiveness that penetrated my mind and spirit in a way that shaped everything I would do and am still doing as a pastor, professor, and writer. And not just my vocational life—also my personal life, my marriage and family, my friends and community and church. The inductive imagination continued to develop into a biblical imagination.

And not only for me. My sense is that this way of reading the Bible—and *living* the Bible—has been transformative for thousands; probably by now the number must run into the millions.

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Eugene H. Peterson

Pastor Emeritus, Christ Our King Presbyterian Church, Bel Air, Maryland

Professor Emeritus of Spiritual Theology, Regent College, British Columbia

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Preface

Our intention is to present rather comprehensively our understanding of the approach to the study of the Bible known as *inductive Bible study*, and to direct this presentation primarily to seminary students and those engaged in Christian ministry. But we anticipate that this volume will be useful also to scholars who are engaged in advanced study of the Bible and who are conversant with contemporary hermeneutical discussions. Moreover, we hope that it will be serviceable as a textbook for certain college and university courses. Though this book is based on serious hermeneutical reflection and will at points engage current hermeneutical issues, its primary purpose is to provide practical guidance in original, accurate, precise, and penetrating study of the Bible.

This book serves as a sequel to *Methodical Bible Study*, by Robert A. Traina, which many have used as a reliable introduction to inductive Bible study. We are gratified by the influence and popularity of *Methodical Bible Study* and are encouraged that it continues to be used as a textbook in numerous seminaries and colleges around the world; yet that book is somewhat dated, for it has not been revised since its appearance in 1952. Moreover, whereas *Methodical Bible Study* was intended to be a general description of inductive Bible study, arranged topically in terms of major components, this book offers a specific, orderly process that readers can apply directly as they work with particular biblical texts. In addition, it reflects significant developments in the presentation of method that have come about as the result of years of classroom instruction, further reflection, and new insights into hermeneutics that have emerged since 1952. Together we have a combined sixty years of seminary teaching of inductive Bible study since *Methodical Bible Study* first appeared.

A number of clarifications in the area of inductive Bible study have emerged over the years, many of them related to developments in hermeneutical reflection among biblical scholars in general. This volume cites and interacts with

contemporary literature. For the inductive study of Scripture to have any future, it must converse with the major issues and considerations that are surfacing in the burgeoning discipline of hermeneutics.

In addition, we are convinced of the necessity for a fuller treatment of the principle of induction, the implications of induction, and the importance of an attitude of induction. Although inductive Bible study involves certain steps that are performed, it is not solely a matter of techniques. It involves, above all, a commitment to an inductive posture, which means radical openness to the meaning of the text, wherever a study characterized by radical openness might lead.

This book is the result of collaboration between Dr. Robert A. Traina, a graduate of The Biblical Seminary in New York (now New York Theological Seminary) and for many years a member of the faculty of that institution, and later academic dean and F. M. and Ada Thompson Professor of English Bible at Asbury Theological Seminary, and Dr. David R. Bauer, a student of Dr. Traina at Asbury and currently dean of the School of Biblical Interpretation and Proclamation and the Ralph Waldo Beeson Professor of Inductive Biblical Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary. In personal and communal study, we have found that the inductive approach as set forth in this book has caused the Bible to come alive in ways that far surpassed our greatest expectations. Through this process we have consistently encountered the God to whom the biblical text bears witness. We hope that all who read and use this book will find the assistance that will enable them to experience the same kind of excitement and encounter.

We gladly thank those who have played a role in the production of this book. We are grateful to Mrs. Judy Traina Seitz, who assisted greatly in its editing and organization. We are indebted to many students and colleagues who read early drafts of the manuscript and offered helpful suggestions. And we are grateful to Mr. James Kinney, director of Baker Academic at Baker Publishing Group, for his encouragement and meticulous care in bringing this book to publication.

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David R. Bauer
Robert A. Traina
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Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
BDAG	W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000
BDB	F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1907. Reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1979, 1996, with *Strong's* numbering
BLS	Bible and Literature Series
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
GBS	Guides to Biblical Scholarship
Hermeneia	Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
IBT	Interpreting Biblical Texts
ICC	International Critical Commentary
Int	*Interpretation*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
LCBI	Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation
LEC	Library of Early Christianity
LXX	Septuagint
NASB	New American Standard Bible

NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
NTL	New Testament Library
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
OT	Old Testament
OTL	Old Testament Library
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
TDNT	*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–67
TDOT	*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Edited by G. J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, and Heinz-Joseph Fabry. Translated by J. T. Willis et al. 15 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–2006
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

Introduction

Meaning of Inductive Bible Study

We should begin by indicating what we mean by *induction*. The term *inductive* is used in both a broader and a narrower sense. In the broader sense, it involves a commitment to move from the evidence of the text and the realities that surround the text to possible conclusions (or inferences) regarding the meaning of the text. In this sense, *inductive* is practically synonymous with *evidential* over against *deductive*, which is presuppositional, involving a movement from presuppositions with which one approaches the text to a reading of the text intended to support these presuppositions.

This broader sense of inductive, with its stress on the movement from evidential premises to inferences, implies an emphasis on inductive, inferential reasoning: one examines the evidence in order to determine what may properly be inferred from the evidence for the meaning of passages. This broader sense of inductive also involves the attempt to help students understand and process the critical interaction between their preunderstandings, including theological creeds and doctrinal commitments, and the witness of the biblical text.

In the narrower sense, *inductive Bible study* pertains to a movement in the history of hermeneutics that traces its beginnings to the work of William Rainey Harper, of Yale and the University of Chicago, and his associate Wilbert Webster White, a Yale-trained Hebraist and the founder of The Biblical Seminary in New York.[1] These scholars were concerned that the almost exclusive attention paid to higher-critical issues—such as trying to reconstruct sources that presumably lie behind the final form of the text, which focused on more or less speculative elements behind the biblical text rather than on the text itself—rendered the

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1. The authoritative resource for the life and work of Wilbert Webster White is still Charles R. Eberhardt, *The Bible in the Making of Ministers: The Scriptural Basis of Theological Education; The Lifework of Wilbert Webster White* (New York: Association Press, 1949).

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study of the Bible lifeless and devoid of clear significance for Christian faith and ministry. Consequently, they insisted that students should give priority to examining the scriptural text in its final form, although eventually they should consider evidence from historical and even historical-critical examination of the text. This procedure involved (1) direct study of the biblical text in the student's mother tongue,[2] with the hope that students who had opportunity and ability would supplement the study of the Bible in the vernacular with original-language analysis; and (2) special attention to the ways in which the immediate and broader-book context of passages and the literary structure of passages themselves inform students' understanding of their meaning.

Although the origin of inductive Bible study in the narrow sense is associated especially with the founding of The Biblical Seminary in 1900, this approach had precursors in the history of interpretation and has, since the beginning of the twentieth century, enjoyed widespread dissemination. Over the years it has been part of the instruction in such institutions as Princeton Theological Seminary, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, Fuller Theological Seminary, the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, Columbia Theological Seminary, Dallas Theological Seminary, and Azusa Pacific University, to say nothing of the hundreds of schools outside North America that have adopted the inductive study of the Bible. In addition, inductive Bible study has significantly influenced the work of several scholars of global reputation.

Inductive Bible study is probably best known, however, in its lay-oriented forms. For example, it has become central in the discipleship development program of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship; and it has been introduced to millions through the writings of popular authors. One of the advantages of inductive Bible study is that it can contribute to the most sophisticated and serious biblical scholarship while also equipping laypersons to study the text for themselves.

Emphases in Inductive Bible Study

This more narrow sense of *induction* involves a number of emphases that reflect both the convictions of Harper and White and the ways in which induc-

2. Thus inductive Bible study was often called "English Bible," as reflected, for example, in the curriculum of The Biblical Seminary in New York. This nomenclature accurately represents the emphasis that was given to the study of the Bible in the vernacular but was problematic in that (1) it assumed an English-language environment and was insufficiently global in its reference; (2) it gave the impression that inductive Bible study was limited to vernacular translations, whereas from the beginning it was acknowledged that inductive Bible study would be ideally executed with texts in the original languages; and (3) it seemed to suggest that the use of the vernacular was the central concern when actually the principle of induction was the operative issue, and the role of the vernacular was understood to be a tactical concession to the limits of linguistic equipment on the part of most students as they pursued their inductive work in the Bible.

tive Bible study has developed over the years. First, it emphasizes the meaning of the *final form* of the text. This attention to the final form arises from two considerations. The first consideration is that this final form is, in fact, the only text that actually exists today. All earlier sources or redactional (editorial) processes that may lie behind the text and could have contributed to the development of the text are more or less speculative in terms of whether they ever existed or their specific character or shape. In any case these earlier stages of the tradition no longer have a material existence but are scholarly constructions. As we shall see, an inductive approach recognizes that source theories and redactional reconstructions might at times be helpful in the interpretation of the final text and should be employed in interpretation, with the proviso that their tentative character and their limitations must be kept in mind. But it is both unwise and unrealistic to focus on entities that do not (presently) have an existence independent of the minds and judgments of scholars and about whose (past) existence scholars themselves disagree. The second consideration is that the church has accepted this final form of the text as canonical Scripture.[3] Indeed, when one talks about the Bible, one assumes a canonical collection and one implies a canonical form. Thus inductive Bible study gives priority both in emphasis and in sequence to the direct study of the text in its final form. Subsequently, the use of background knowledge, considerations of the developments of traditions that lie behind the final form of the text, the history of interpretation, and so forth are incorporated into an overall process that has as its starting point the examination of the text itself and has as its goal the meaning of the text in its final, canonical shape.

3. The implications of the canon of Scripture for the centrality of the study of the final form of the text are most thoroughly and vigorously set forth by Francis Watson. See esp. his *Text, Church, and World: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 15–17, 60–63, 70–77, 221–40. See also Robert W. Wall, "Canonical Context and Canonical Conversations," in *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology*, ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 165–82. But the view that the final form is the proper focus for the study of the Bible as the church's canon is universally identified with the "canonical approach" of Brevard S. Childs. See esp. his *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979). In this regard, Childs's approach should be distinguished from the "canonical criticism" of James Sanders, who insists that the notion of canon points not to the centrality of the final form, or canonical shape, of the text, but rather to the dynamic process of the readaptation of traditions within the community of faith, both as reflected within the Bible itself and as carried on within the interpretive practice of the church throughout its history. See James Sanders, *Torah and Canon* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972); idem, *Canon and Community: A Guide to Canonical Criticism*, GBS (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); idem, *From Sacred Story to Sacred Text: Canon as Paradigm* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987). For a helpful comparison of the canonical approaches of Childs and Sanders, see Frank Spina, "Canonical Criticism: Childs versus Sanders," in *Interpreting God's Word for Today: An Inquiry into Hermeneutics from a Biblical Theological Perspective*, ed. Wayne McCown and James Massey, Wesleyan Theological Perspectives 2 (Anderson, IN: Warner, 1982), 165–94.

A second emphasis of inductive Bible study is the *form* of the text, giving serious attention to the ways students can identify for themselves literary structure and can show how such structure informs the meaning of the text. It also pays attention to the ways in which literary genre has a bearing upon construal of meaning. This emphasis upon structure and genre is supported by the consideration that communication never comes as pure content but that form and content are always inextricably bound together in the communicative process.

The concern with the final form of the text leads to an emphasis upon the *study of the biblical book* as, in most cases, the basic literary unit in the Bible's final form. As G. Campbell Morgan suggests, the Bible is not so much a book as it is a library of books.[4] Consequently, an inductive approach insists that students recognize both the importance of interpreting individual passages in light of their function within the world of the book in which they stand and the importance of grasping the message of books-as-wholes.

Inductive Bible study involves an emphasis upon students *developing their own skills* in the study of the Bible. This development of skill is accomplished through students' consistent and constant firsthand study of the text itself, using background information, critical approaches, commentaries, and other secondary sources in the process of an overarching program that focuses—in both its starting point and goal—upon their ability to construe the meaning of the final form of the text. Students can best understand hermeneutical principles and can most effectively learn how to study the Bible as they themselves pursue an experimental practice of actually observing, interpreting, and appropriating the biblical text.

Inductive Bible study also emphasizes practicability, with a concern for adapting the methodological program to realistic expectations of what readers of the Bible, including those preparing for and involved in Christian ministry, can reasonably achieve as they seek to incorporate the principle of induction into their own useable process. This emphasis arises out of the conviction that inductive Bible study seeks to tailor a methodical approach to all aspects of the existence of the biblical text, which includes the relationship of the reader/interpreter to the biblical text and to the dynamic study of that text. Thus an inductive approach attends not only to the nature of the biblical text but also to the nature of the student and to the realities that exist in the situation of most students.

Inductive study of the Bible likewise emphasizes a *broad methodical process* that involves particular orderly steps or phases. Inductive Bible study should not be considered as one specific exegetical approach that can be set alongside

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4. G. Campbell Morgan, *The Study and Teaching of the English Bible*, rev. E. D. De Rusett (London: Hodder & Stoughton; New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1910), 30–31. Also available online at http://www.gcampbellmorgan.com/studyteach.html.

other exegetical approaches, such as form criticism, redaction criticism, or narrative criticism.[5] Rather, it is a holistic program that seeks to incorporate the values of the various specific exegetical approaches or procedures within it, and it is methodical in recognizing that the practical reality of the actual study of the Bible requires serious attention to certain steps performed in a certain sequence.

A further emphasis of inductive Bible study has to do with the *dynamic interrelation* between the various specific steps or phases in the study of the Bible over against a rigidly linear model that understands these phases to exist in isolation from one another or that assumes the possibility of completing a certain phase and never returning to it. Rather, an inductive approach is *spiracular*: it is characterized by a spiral in the sense that once students move from observation to interpretation, they will see the need to correct some of the observations they have made and will make additional observations. When students move from interpretation to contemporary appropriation, they will recognize additional aspects of interpretation and perhaps correct some dimensions of their interpretation. In other words, although one can and should differentiate among the various specific steps, these steps constantly impinge upon one another in the actual practice of inductive Bible study. Thus the issue is emphasis rather than mutual exclusion.

Finally, inductive Bible study emphasizes the development of a *holistic and integrative* process that seeks to be comprehensive in the following ways:

1. It tries to incorporate within its model all legitimate evidence, wherever it is found, including insights from critical approaches and every appropriate exegetical operation in the study of the text, but it seeks to do so at the most effective point in the process and in the most effective fashion.
2. It tries to deal with the text at its various levels: the book, the division, the section, the segment, the paragraph, the sentence. Inductive Bible study also provides for studying the canon-as-a-whole so as to assist in tracing the meaning of themes throughout the Bible and the relations between the two Testaments.
3. It tries to address the range of the hermeneutical concerns, which includes initial observation of the text,[6] interpretation, considerations of

5. For helpful discussions of these specific exegetical (and esp. critical) approaches, see John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study*, rev. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996); I. Howard Marshall, ed., *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977); David Alan Black and David S. Dockery, eds., *Interpreting the New Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001); Joel B. Green, ed., *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

6. Including interrogation, that is, raising questions of these observations in an attempt to probe their interpretive significance.

contemporary appropriation and proclamation, and the correlation of the teachings of individual passages and books into a biblical theology and a biblically based theology. This approach rejects a textual atomism or disjunction that would fail to take connections within the text seriously. And it also rejects a methodological atomism that would present various approaches or steps in exegetical work as self-standing and as functioning in isolation from one another.

Although we have just described major emphases that have come to characterize inductive Bible study, we acknowledge that those who practice inductive Bible study, even in the more narrow sense of the tradition of Harper and White, do not adopt an absolutely monolithic model; rather, in a variety of ways practitioners have developed inductive Bible study within certain broad parameters.

Our present work emphasizes the comprehensive and synthetic dimension of inductive Bible study so that it may be methodical, spiracular, holistic, and integrative. As explained, *holistic* and *integrative* describe a comprehensive approach that at the most effective point and in the most effective way incorporates every legitimate exegetical operation of the study of the text, including critical methods. Indeed, one of the purposes of *Methodical Bible Study* (1952) was to relate inductive Bible study, as it had been practiced, to mainstream exegesis: established interpretive techniques employed by scholars around the world. This emphasis upon comprehensiveness and integration is not a departure from the vision of Harper and White but a development of their vision and an articulation of some of their basic concerns. We contend that inductive Bible study is essentially *a comprehensive, holistic study of the Bible that takes into account every aspect of the existence of the biblical text and that is intentional in allowing the Bible in its final canonical shape to speak to us on its own terms, thus leading to accurate, original, compelling, and profound interpretation and contemporary appropriation.*

Two Significant Clarifications

At this point we raise two important issues to clarify the presentation that follows in the remainder of the book. First, we recognize that one of the chief features of an inductive approach is tentativeness and open-endedness; therefore we present our discussion in this book as a working hypothesis, which we invite readers to consider and to judge regarding its legitimacy, appropriateness, practicality, and helpfulness. The method itself should submit to this hypothetical character of induction. We do not claim that this is the last word on induction; the principle of induction requires that a person subject one's understanding of induction or of the inductive process to correction

and development. Indeed, we are open to suggestions of improvement and correction: if we become convinced on evidential grounds that the process as a whole or any specific feature of it is problematic and justifies change or alteration, we are prepared to make the necessary adjustments.

Second, the process we are about to describe is presented in its ideal form. We recognize that readers will need to adapt these principles and procedures to their own abilities, interests, and time constraints. Readers will want to consider what types of modifications and shortcuts they can incorporate to make the process workable for them. We present the process in the large and with significant detail because readers will be able to decide how to adapt and abbreviate only if they have a sense of the entire procedure. Indeed, the full-blown process we discuss is especially relevant for critical and difficult passages in the Bible; many passages will not require the kind of full implementation of method described here.

Overview of Presentation

Part 1, "Theoretical Foundations," is the first of the book's five parts and presents the hermeneutical bases for the inductive approach as set forth in the remainder of the book. It deals with such issues as the meaning of induction over against deduction, the relation between induction and presupposition, and the major characteristics of an inductive approach.

Part 2, "Observing and Asking," begins the presentation of the actual implementation of an inductive approach to the biblical text. This part, along with the remainder of the book, uses 2 Timothy 3:16–17 as an example of each of the stages discussed along the way. We will also include many additional specific examples from the Bible. Observation involves the discipline of being attentive to all elements within the text and serves as the basis for raising questions, the answering of which constitutes interpretation.

Part 3, "Answering or Interpreting," discusses in depth the various kinds of evidence used in the process of interpretation. This part also gives careful attention to the process of reasoning inferentially from evidential premises to inferences.

Part 4, "Evaluating and Appropriating," explores the process of examining the teachings of passages, as derived from interpretation, to determine which of these teachings can be legitimately appropriated directly in other times and places (including our own) over against those that are so closely bound to the original situation as not to be directly applicable. This part also gives attention to the process of examining contemporary situations so as to understand them in depth and to determine if, and to what extent, the passage might pertain to a given contemporary situation. Additionally, this part explores the specific creative and constructive process of relating the teaching of a biblical passage to contemporary situations.

Part 5, "Correlation," discusses the movement from the teaching of individual passages and books to the construction of a New Testament or Old Testament theology, and then to a biblical theology. This part also discusses ways in which all of these elements relate to, and might contribute to, a biblically based systematic theology.

Suggestions for Reading

In anticipation of some of the problems that commonly arise in this process—and because an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, as the saying goes—here are a few suggestions that we hope will prepare readers for better understanding and using the forthcoming material.

First of all, readers should try to see the methodical process of study as a whole before trying to apply any of its parts. Such perspective is necessary because of the interrelatedness of the various steps. They are so interdependent that understanding the purpose and function of any one of them is impossible without knowing its relation to what precedes and follows. Consequently, we urge readers to peruse the entire book before trying to use its suggestions or even before making a serious attempt to fully understand any of its parts. Further, readers should take advantage of the introductions and summaries that precede the various sections in order to note carefully their contents and organization. In these ways readers will be able to see the interrelations between the steps and thus to apply each individual step more intelligently.

We also suggest that when readers are ready to apply the material they use either the exercises given throughout the book or comparable exercises. The inclusion of exercises suggests certain similarities between developing a methodical approach to biblical passages and developing a strong physique. Both are accomplished primarily through actual practice, and both are gradual and consequently demand patient perseverance. Just as a strong body cannot be realized by merely reading a discussion on the subject or by taking a few easy lessons, a mere perusal of this book will not produce the ability to do inductive Bible study. This discussion will prove of real worth if it indicates certain lines of action that readers may pursue and in that pursuit they teach themselves how to do inductive Bible study. Such a process will take years if not an entire lifetime. The exercises pertain to Jonah and Mark, thus offering students an opportunity to apply the principles to both Old Testament and New Testament texts. Readers may also find our own work and the work of others on the passages at www.inductivebiblicalstudy.com.

We encourage those who use this book to look up examples in their Bibles and to make a serious attempt to discover the ways those examples illumine the ideas to which they correspond. Finding one's own illustrations for the various points is helpful.

Readers should utilize at least some of the bibliographic suggestions because the following presentation by no means exhausts the vast field of Bible study.[7] The discussion must of necessity be in the form of an outline guide that should be used in collaboration with other books in the field. Some of these books will be indicated in the course of the discussion and others in the footnotes.

In addition, readers should test for themselves the statements made. We do not expect readers to accept them unquestioningly. On the contrary, we urge readers to pursue their own inductive study. And if in so doing they arrive at conclusions that contradict those of this book, they have not only the privilege but also the obligation to embrace what they have found.

Readers are likewise encouraged to practice suspended judgment. They are urged neither to accept nor to reject statements immediately upon reading them. Readers should give the ideas some time to take effect. If, for example, some readers are unable to see the purpose of certain suggestions, and if the suggestions appear to be superfluous or even ridiculous, readers should leave room for the possibility that the suggestions may have a necessary function and that, given time, that function may become clear. Also, readers should have specific and sound reasons for accepting or rejecting certain ideas. And even after readers have formed conclusions, they need to be willing to change those conclusions if and when new data come to light that would necessitate such a change. These suggestions are true to the inductive approach.

Readers should also remember that this book is intended to present a comprehensive view of hermeneutics and is primarily designed for those who are preparing for a Christian professional vocation. However, we are not saying that readers can make no adaptations or simplifications. Average laypersons, for example, must employ a simpler version if they are to study the Bible for themselves.[8] But the most important point is to realize that one cannot begin with abbreviated studies, for abbreviating what is not first understood in a more complete way is impossible. In other words, a more or less ideal conceptualization is requisite for a valid abbreviation.

Readers should also be aware that repetition is purposely employed in this book as a necessary pedagogical device and in order to insure thorough presentation. We have tried to conceive of ourselves as personal tutors of everyone who reads this material. Therefore our primary concern has not been to use the fewest possible words to describe inductive Bible study but to think

7. For a relatively comprehensive guide to resources in biblical studies, see David R. Bauer, *An Annotated Guide to Biblical Resources for Ministry* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003).

8. A number of fine books or manuals are intended to introduce laypersons to inductive Bible study, including David L. Thompson, *Bible Study That Works*, rev. ed. (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Publishing House, 1994); Oletta Wald, *The Joy of Discovery in Bible Study*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1975).

in terms of effective communication. Repetition is one of the most effective means of imparting ideas.

Readers should also keep in mind that mechanics are a necessary part of any worthwhile activity. Einstein became a great physicist because he first learned the laws of physics. Paderewski had to spend hours practicing finger exercises before he developed the ability to interpret the spirit of great composers. Neither of these men could have reached his position without so mastering the mechanics of his field that they became second nature to him and thus the means by which he could delve into the mysteries of the universe or capture the emotional quality of great music. Eliminate the mechanics of physics and piano playing, and you eliminate Einstein and Paderewski. Indeed, every child who has ever learned to play the piano knows that learning tedious scales is a prerequisite for the enjoyment of masterful performance.

The same principle should be applied to Bible study. As much as one might like to avoid the mechanics of Bible study, one must realize that they cannot be eliminated, for there is no mystical or purely intuitive means for arriving at scriptural truth. One cannot bypass the techniques of exegesis and expect to become a profound interpreter of the Bible any more than one can expect to become a great pianist without mastering the techniques of fingering the keyboard.[9] Some students believe that mechanics and the Spirit are irreconcilable because mechanics necessitate self-discipline and at times are tedious. One should be careful, however, not to equate the tedious with the unimportant, for such a mistake would be just as fatal to a Bible student as to a pianist. Or more positively, one should gladly discipline oneself to master the mechanics, knowing that though the necessary road might be hard, the joys to be found at the destination are well worth the difficulties of the journey.

Furthermore, a methodical process should not be made an end in itself. This points to a real danger because the mechanics might loom so large as to hide their purpose. As Christian believers, we are convinced that the development of a methodical, inductive approach is the means of training the mind to become a more fit instrument for the operation of God's Spirit. Because biblical interpretation involves a rational process, the mind must function properly if interpretation is to be valid. But the mind's proper function is not automatic; therefore the mind needs to be trained, or it might become the means of negating God's Spirit. A methodical approach involves a description of how the Spirit works through the mind and how one might cooperate with the Spirit so that the Spirit might function freely.[10]

9. We recognize that effective Bible study cannot be reduced to technique but also recognize that technique is the necessary concretization of attitude, perspective, and theory.

10. This thought introduces the vexing issue of the role of faith in biblical interpretation, an issue that will be addressed in part 1.

The ultimate purpose of mechanics and certainly of this manual, then, is that readers might through their use in studying the Scriptures come to know the real author of the Scriptures, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent. We have recorded the suggestions found on these pages only because in our own experience the application of this process has enabled us to realize a more intimate relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Additionally, a methodical, inductive process may also have value for unbelievers. As such, it can be utilized to make possible a better understanding of the biblical text even without a prior faith commitment.

Finally, readers should avoid conceiving of this book as an attempt to dictate a precise and rigid formula for Bible study. We make this suggestion for the following reasons:

- The very nature of thought processes makes coercing the mind into an inflexible pattern or an intellectual straitjacket infeasible. For example, one might indicate that certain steps should be taken before the interpretive phase of study begins. But at times one's thoughts will naturally move to interpretation, especially when the meaning of what is noted is self-evident. Such elasticity is intrinsic to the mind and should be respected.
- Individual differences also make it impractical for one person to force a stringent formula for Bible study upon others. Now certain basic principles might be laid down as essential, ones that cannot be transgressed if one's approach is to be inductive; but in the precise application of these principles, individuals must be left to determine what is most suitable and effective for them.
- Even in relation to the general pattern and concrete steps suggested, one must make allowance for interplay. The various phases of study are interdependent: The first phase contributes to the second, and the second in turn contributes to the first. We shall have occasion to call attention to this principle frequently in the forthcoming discussion. Furthermore, none of the individual aspects of a study process is ever fully completed. Therefore, if finishing the first phase were needed before moving to the second, the latter would never be reached.

For these and other reasons, the contents of the following pages should not be construed as an exact formula to be followed page for page every time one studies a given passage. Rather, they primarily involve an analysis of Bible study that might be used as a basis for formulating a methodical, inductive approach to biblical passages. Readers must understand this fact if they are to use the following material. This manual tries to dissect the study process to discover its component parts. It might therefore be likened to the exercises used to teach typing, which represent an analysis of the typing process. No

one engages in all the typing exercises every time one sends an email, so we don't expect that every Bible study will be an exact replica of this book. On the contrary, readers are urged to take the basic concepts involved in the forthcoming analysis and use them as a foundation for building a methodical, inductive approach that will suit their own individual talents and needs.

Part 1

Theoretical Foundations

At the very outset, any discussion of biblical hermeneutics should address the issue of method. Hermeneutics deals with the way one thinks about and executes the practice of studying the Bible. Thus the concern for practice or performance poses the fundamental question as to *how* it is to be done, which is essentially the question of method. This present study of hermeneutics begins, then, by exploring the meaning of method and the ways in which method illumines the practice of Bible study.

Our English word *method* is really a transliteration of the Greek *methodos*, which literally means a "way of transit," a way of moving from one point to another or from where we are toward our destination. The following brief definitions capture the essence of *method*:

- *Webster's II New College Dictionary* defines *method* as "a manner or means of *procedure*, especially a *systematic* and regular way of accomplishing a given task, . . . *an orderly and planned arrangement*."[1]

- John Dewey, perhaps the most prominent educational theorist in the twentieth century, said, "Method at bottom is but the *way of doing things* followed in any given case, . . . the *main steps* that have to be taken . . .

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1. *Webster's II New College Dictionary*, s.v. "Method." In this and the two representative definitions that follow, emphasis has been added.

and the crucial points where conditions of growth have to be carefully maintained and fostered."[2]

- In his careful reflection on the ways in which *method* has been defined and used, Howard Tillman Kuist concludes: "Conceived in its widest possible scope, method is procedure. And the primary consideration in procedure of any kind is that it be suited to the end in view. Experience teaches men that when anything is to be done, some ways are *better*, certain movements more effective, than others. . . . Method is the conscious accommodation of one's powers to the *requirements of the situation*."[3]

To summarize these definitions, *method* has

- character—is orderly, systematic (Webster)
- content—has certain specific steps (Dewey)
- criterion—what is the best way or most suitable to the task (Kuist)

The basic meaning of *method*, then, is "the best specific procedure for doing anything," where "best" is determined by what is suitable to the task. Hence, central to the notion of method is the principle of suitability. A requisite characteristic of method is that it should correspond in nature with its objective, for it is the means by which the objective is reached. For example, method applied to throwing a baseball would include, among other things, gripping the ball firmly, cocking the arm back, and propelling the ball by a forward flip of the arm. These steps are true because of the very nature of throwing a baseball. In pursuing any significant activity one should always ask, What is the nature of the task, and given the nature of the task, what is the best, most suitable, most effective way to proceed?

The application of the principle of suitability to Bible study involves reflecting upon the three major factors involved in the study of the Bible:

1. The Bible
2. The student/reader/interpreter
3. The relationship between the Bible and the student/reader/interpreter

The operative question is, Given the nature of the Bible in all aspects of its existence, the nature of the student, and the relationship between the Bible and the student, what is the most suitable way to proceed?

2. John Dewey, "Method," in *Cyclopedia of Education*, ed. Paul Monroe (New York: Macmillan, 1913), 4:204–5.

3. Howard Tillman Kuist, *These Words upon Thy Heart: Scripture and the Christian Response* (Richmond: John Knox, 1947), 47–48.

We devote the remainder of this part to the presentation of the major characteristics of proper Bible study. These characteristics stem from our convictions regarding the nature of the Bible, of the student, and of the relationship between the Bible and the student. We will sometimes make these convictions explicit, but at other times they will remain implicit. However, these convictions consistently stand behind all that will be presented in this enumeration of major characteristics and, indeed, in the presentation of Bible study throughout the remainder of the book. We emphasize, however, that these characteristics and the underlying convictions from which they stem are presented as a working hypothesis. We recognize that they do not possess anything like a stamp of divine imprimatur but are set forth for the thoughtful consideration of the reader, who is invited to accept them or reject them, yet hopefully always on the basis of reasonable and evidential considerations.

1

Inductive Study

Meaning of Induction and Deduction

The present discussion employs the term *inductive* synonymously with *evidential*: that is, a commitment to the evidence in and around the text so as to allow that evidence to determine our understanding of the meaning of the text, wherever that evidence may lead. *Deduction* is used synonymously with *presuppositional*: that is, a commitment to certain assumptions (whether stated or implicit) that we allow to determine our understanding of the meaning of the text.

   The importance of adopting an inductive approach to the study of the Bible is based on the principle of suitability, which stands at the center of the very notion of method. Induction best suits the nature of the Bible, which stands outside of ourselves and has its own message to speak to us, a message that has its basis in, and emerges out of, its own social, linguistic, and historical context. The Bible, as we personify it, beckons us to hear its message on its own terms; it wishes to speak a new word to us, challenging our presuppositions over against conforming to them. Induction is the method of history and the humanities, including literature, whereas deduction is the method of mathematics, which assumes a self-established closed system. But an inductive approach is appropriate for exploring realities that have an existence of their own and cannot be contained by a system that we bring to them.

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Essential Aspects of Induction and Deduction

An inductive approach to Bible study has two essential aspects: an inductive spirit, or attitude, and an inductive process that implements such a spirit and attitude. Ideally an inductive attitude precedes an inductive process, but at any rate, both must be present and are indispensable for genuine inductive Bible study.

The test of the inductive spirit is whether one's approach is characterized by *radical openness* to any conclusion required by the biblical evidence. This attitude is the inner dimension of the inductive approach, while any specific process that might be considered inductive is its outer expression and implementation.

The deductive spirit and the inductive spirit are mutually exclusive. The deductive spirit is dogmatic and authoritarian, absolute and categorical, characterized by a closed mind. It amounts to hermeneutical absolutism. It does not entertain the possibility of being in error and therefore is unwilling to change. It is not open to challenge or dissent. It is resistant to the discussion of differing views. It is often concerned with seeking supportive proof texts for a position already held. This dogmatic mentality is well expressed in the saying "My mind is made up; don't confuse me with the facts."

The deductive attitude may be motivated by the fear that cherished traditions are subject to challenge. Such traditions, often based on the acceptance of what a person has heard preached or taught, may not have been examined critically in the light of the biblical text. They are sometimes viewed as foundational to one's belief system, and the fear exists that an open-minded scrutiny of them might cause the belief system to crumble.

Persons with this mentality try to control the outcome of Bible study by indicating in advance the interpretations that should result from the process. Accordingly, certain creedal presuppositions, including various theological systems or particular doctrines, are brought to the Scriptures and inevitably predetermine the outcome of the interpretation of texts.[1] The process is circular and self-confirming. In such cases, instead of hearing the text on its own terms, the interpreter tells the text what it should mean.

Still others have problems with the biblical worldview and consequently try to interpret the text so that it conforms to their own contrasting worldview. Thus, instead of focusing at the interpretive phase on the message being communicated through the text and leaving value judgments until later, they begin by imposing their own views on the text and reading it accordingly. For example, some people make an a priori assumption that the universe is closed and that miracles cannot happen, so they interpret miracle stories as "myths." Others begin with the assumption that transcendent divine revelation

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1. See James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978). See also the discussion in appendix B below.

is impossible; therefore they understand the text exclusively in terms of the history of religions, as a record of merely human thinking and striving after the Divine. Even social and political agendas—such as feminism, liberation theology, capitalism, or socialism—have been brought to the hermeneutical process in order to predetermine its outcome. Among the major concerns of the leaders at the beginning of the inductive Bible study movement were the so-called assured results of biblical criticism, which those who taught inductive Bible study recognized to be actually a set of assumptions (some of them better grounded than others, but all of them speculative) that often served as a prism through which to view the biblical text. One could cite many other examples of more or less unexamined views that have been used by those with a dogmatic, deductive spirit.

In contrast, the inductive spirit and the process by which it is implemented seek to be undogmatic. The inductively minded person welcomes discussion and even challenges; this eagerness is based on the desire to hear whatever the text has to say, whether one agrees or disagrees. Such an inductively minded person recognizes that at a later point one will have opportunity to make value judgments concerning the message communicated by the text. Furthermore, one who has this inductive spirit is willing to acknowledge one's own fallibility and to begin any interpretation with the statement, "I may be wrong, but this is my understanding and the evidential reasons for it." Such a person is open to changing one's view if the evidence warrants it. In fact, the person with a truly inductive spirit will actively seek differing interpretations and the reasons for them. Even if one does not find grounds to justify a change in one's own understanding of the text, at least one will have a better understanding and perhaps a better appreciation for differing points of view.

If what has been said above about the character of induction is valid, some of what passes as inductive Bible study is not truly inductive because this kind of spirit is lacking. One can mimic particular techniques of the inductive process while harboring a deductive spirit, thereby giving the appearance of induction without its reality. In such cases the deductive mentality takes over and becomes dominant at some point in the process.

Fortunately, one can begin with a deductive spirit and eventually adopt an inductive spirit through a direct study of the text. This transformation often happens when the inferential process—the process of reasoning from evidential premises to possible conclusions, which is often used subconsciously—is brought to the level of consciousness and the tests for its soundness are applied.

Conversely, one can begin with an undogmatic spirit and go awry because of the absence of a proper process to implement it; having a radical openness to the text is not sufficient. It is essential to identify a process that truly allows the text to speak for itself, which is the goal of the person with an inductive

spirit. One must avoid divorcing an inductive spirit from an inductive process if one hopes to genuinely engage in inductive Bible study.

The discussion now turns to a focus on the second component of inductive Bible study—*the inductive process*. This process is the attempt to implement an inductive spirit. The reader must not lose sight of the indispensability of the inductive spirit, which gives rise to the process. Otherwise the process will become form devoid of the spirit that gives it meaning and purpose.

The inductive process is the test as well as the expression of the inductive spirit or attitude. In general, the inductive process is whatever is most effective and efficient in determining the meaning of the text and thus effectuating or implementing an inductive attitude. In the following pages, we propose a specific inductive process by which we intend to accomplish this goal. We set forth this process in an undogmatic, inductive spirit because this process too should be open to discussion and challenge. Readers do need to implement this process in order to understand it, but once they understand it, we urge readers to determine for themselves the inductive process that in their judgment best implements the inductive spirit.

Both the deductive spirit and the inductive spirit are expressed in a process of *inferential reasoning* that flows from them. Inferential reasoning—drawing conclusions from premises about the meaning of a passage—is inevitable and unavoidable in any understanding of the biblical text. The inferential reasoning may be subconscious or conscious, presuppositional or evidential, dogmatic or hypothetical, illogical or logical, invalid or valid. One thing is certain: inferential reasoning is always present when interpretation occurs.

One does not need to become skilled in proper inferential reasoning to gain what the community of faith considers to be a saving knowledge from the Scriptures; however, those who aspire to leadership in the community of faith should develop skills in inferential reasoning in order to gain a more accurate and profound grasp of the scriptural message.

In the process of inferential reasoning, some constants or essentials flow from both induction and deduction. Both deduction and induction contain two major components: one or more *premises* followed by an *inference*, sometimes called a conclusion. A premise is a statement or assertion from which one may causally derive an inference or conclusion. Thus "therefore" or its equivalent stands between one or more premises and an inference.

In deductive inferential reasoning, one or more deductive premises (which are presuppositional and absolute) are employed. In inductive inferential reasoning, by way of contrast, inductive premises that are evidential and conditional are employed. Deductive inferences are, like deductive premises, absolute and unchangeable; on the other hand, inductive inferences are hypothetical and probable, therefore open to change.

We have been describing the constants or essentials of inferential reasoning that exist in both induction and deduction. But the process of inferential

reasoning also has variables, whether that reasoning is inductive or deductive. What is variable in both deduction and induction is that in both cases the premises as well as the inferences may be either general or particular.[2] Definitions of induction often describe inductive reasoning as the movement from particular data to general inference, and some definitions of deduction describe deductive reasoning as the movement from general premises to particular conclusions; yet such definitions tend to be limited in their perspective and overlook the different ways deduction and induction can be used, as appendix A indicates. Although in some cases inductive reasoning involves the movement from particular premises to general inferences and in some cases deductive reasoning involves the movement from general premises to conclusions regarding particulars, all of this concern with general and particular is not essential to induction and deduction as such. Both deductive and inductive premises and inferences may be either general or particular, depending on what is appropriate or suitable in individual cases.[3]

2. This point is well made by Joel Rudinow and Vincent E. Barry, *Invitation to Critical Thinking*, 5th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson, 2004), 147–48.

3. Two factors determine whether the premises and inferences of deduction and induction are general or particular. One is the nature of the task and of the goal of their use in a given task. In some cases deductive premises that are general as well as presuppositional and absolute are required, as is true of mathematical logic, which often begins with general axioms such as that of Euclid: Things equal to the same thing are equal to each other. To the contrary, the deductive use of general premises in approaching literary texts, such as the Bible, is inappropriate and unsuitable because of the differences between mathematics and literature. Literature consists of particular texts, and any reasoning about them must begin with particular premises based on those particular texts, not general statements about them.

At the same time, deductive reasoning may begin with particular premises based on particular literary texts and assume a meaning that is incorrect, thereby leading to unsound inferences. The issue in this case is not whether the premises are general or particular but whether they are presuppositional and absolute, or evidential and conditional. Thus deductive premises may be either general or particular; in addition, as will become evident, both deductive and inductive inferences may be either particular or general.

The second factor that accounts for these variations is the stage of the reasoning process. Inferential reasoning is cumulative; it has initial stages, which in turn become building blocks for subsequent stages. Though initially, in examining literary texts as in the scientific endeavor, the premises are necessarily particular, at subsequent stages, when the inferences drawn are in turn used as premises for further inferential reasoning, the inductive premises may be more general, though always evidential and provisional. For example, in science the observation of various episodes of the gravitational pull of the earth may lead to a general inference regarding the pattern of gravitation, which may then be used as a premise to do further inductive inferential reasoning in relation to phenomena not previously observed. Similarly, in the Synoptic Gospels one finds that Jesus repeatedly refers to himself as "the Son of Man." On the basis of particular premises based on this evidence, one may infer that this self-identification is, in general, Jesus's favorite way of describing himself and his role. This general inference may then be used at a subsequent stage of inferential reasoning as a general premise on which to draw further inferences as to the NT's presentation of Jesus's self-consciousness and self-understanding, depending in part on the meaning of "Son of Man." (The prime examples of the later stages of inferential reasoning

To reiterate, what is always constant is that the premises of deductive reasoning are presuppositional and absolute, whereas those of inductive reasoning are evidential and conditional. Accordingly, what is always constant is that deductive inferences, like their premises, are certain and absolute, whereas the inferences in inductive reasoning are probable or hypothetical and open to correction as necessary. Induction and deduction are diametrically opposed in relation to these constants.

The great danger in the process of inferential reasoning is that it often begins subconsciously by deductively embracing one or more premises as axiomatic assumptions, for which adequate evidence is not cited or perhaps cannot be cited. Often such premises are based upon incomplete or partial evidence, or upon general impressions, or upon traditions that one has assumed to be valid. The antidote is to raise one's reasoning process to the level of consciousness.

The wise action, then, especially in relation to very important passages and at least some problematic passages, is to write down one's process of inferential reasoning. Such an objectification of the process will not only make a person conscious of what is occurring but will also enable one more effectively to discover whether one is bringing unrecognized assumptions to the study process and then to test those assumptions.

Inductive reasoning consciously tries to avoid assumptions (or at least tries to test assumptions), hidden or otherwise, because it intends to develop premises solely on evidential grounds. Such premises are always open to change and correction if this is warranted by evidence not previously observed or used. The inductive person does not seek only evidence that supports one's point of view, but rather attempts to observe all of the evidence, whether it agrees or disagrees with one's views. Only after such an endeavor is a premise seriously proposed, although various possible premises may be tested in the process. The critical question is always, What is the evidence?

As to the inferences, deductive reasoning aims at absolute certainty. Thus its inferences, like its premises, are dogmatic. Certainty leads to certainty. Sometimes a valid logical process is followed, though at times inferences are drawn on the basis of logical fallacies. But even in the case of a valid logical

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are found in "correlation"; see part 5.) So both deductive and inductive premises may be either general or particular. Whether they are one or the other does not itself determine whether they are deductive or inductive.

What is true of deductive and inductive premises may also be true of deductive and inductive inferences. They may be either particular or general, depending on what is suitable to the nature and goal of the task at hand and to the stage of the inferential reasoning process. To state unequivocally that deductive inferences are always particular and that inductive inferences are always general is to miss the point of these distinctive lines of reasoning. Again, the issue as to whether the movement is from general to particular or from particular to general is not essential to either induction or deduction but is contingent upon the nature and goal of the task at hand and upon the stage of the inferential reasoning process.

process, one cannot assume that all of the relevant evidence has been found or is being used properly; thus absolute inferences tend to be problematic. The deductive interpreter will refuse to acknowledge that inferences are sometimes unreliable and therefore should not be treated as certain.

Inductive inferences, however, are not only subjected to the test of valid logic; they are also considered hypothetical and therefore always open to change. Such inferences may be accepted as "belief" statements; but they are not necessarily "truth" statements. This distinction is critical because of our fallibility as human interpreters, including fallibility in knowing when we are fallible. In addition, whereas deductive reasoning results in stagnancy and prevents growth in the understanding of the biblical text, inductive reasoning allows room for growth because it makes possible a change in understanding the meaning of the text when appropriate.

These changes do not necessarily involve basic creedal affirmations, such as the belief that God created human beings in God's image and likeness, or that Jesus is the Son of God. Rather, a person may need to change one's understanding of the meaning of the biblical statements and the creedal affirmations based on them. An accurate and profound understanding of the meaning and significance of these realities should be the goal of the biblical student.

Illustration of Inductive and Deductive Inferential Reasoning

The litmus test of the presence and practice of the inductive spirit is the willingness to gather evidence fully and openly for and against the premises stated and to accept them as conditional (when necessary), along with the acknowledgment that the inferences drawn are hypothetical and changeable.[4] Resistance to applying such a test may indicate that the requisite spirit for genuinely inductive Bible study is lacking. Unless and until such a closed attitude changes to one of radical openness, no amount of supposedly inductive procedures will avail. However, the use of these so-called inductive procedures may have some value for the deductive person. But under such conditions, inductive procedures will not have the full value of a truly inductive approach to the text.

Here are several examples of inferential reasoning that may be used, properly or improperly, in interpreting the texts mentioned in the premises for each example. We encourage readers to attempt to identify which of these arguments are inductive and which are deductive.

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4. At times inductive premises could, admittedly, be both evidential and absolute, as is the case when premises are formulated that contain pieces of raw data whose presence is self-evident (e.g., in direct or virtual quotations from the biblical text). However, even here the possible discovery of additional text-critical or other historical data may render absoluteness problematic.

Example 1

PREMISE 1	If God covenanted to give all the physical land of Canaan to the ethnic descendants of Abraham (Gen. 17:8),
PREMISE 2	and if the Jewish people are Abraham's ethnic descendants,
INFERENCE	it would follow from the text that the Jewish people will ultimately and eternally possess all the physical land of Canaan.

Example 2

PREMISE 1	If Genesis 1:3–2:1 states that God created all things in six "days,"
PREMISE 2	and if a "day" as used here is not a twenty-four-hour period,
INFERENCE	it would follow that this text does not mean that God created all things in six consecutive twenty-four-hour periods.

Example 3

PREMISE 1	It is absolutely certain that God by nature is immutably righteous and faithful,
PREMISE 2	and if God made a covenant with Abraham (Gen. 15),
INFERENCE	therefore either it was impossible for God to commit an unrighteous and unfaithful act by breaking this covenant or if he did break the covenant, God's violation could not and would not be unrighteous and unfaithful.[5]

Example 4

PREMISE 1	It was necessary for the Son of God to die in order to satisfy God's wrath.
PREMISE 2	Jesus was the Son of God.
INFERENCE	It would follow that Jesus's death satisfied God's wrath.

Example 5

PREMISE 1	If Jesus's mission is to *fulfill* the law and the prophets and not to abolish them (Matt. 5:17–18),
PREMISE 2	and if *fulfill* means something other than to obey all of the commandments that are found in the Law and the Prophets,
INFERENCE	it would follow that Jesus's mission, according to this passage, was not necessarily to obey all of the commandments in the Law and the Prophets.

The inductive premises in the previous examples are set forth conditionally, though some readers might be inclined to view at least some of them as absolutes. In the final analysis, however, the issue is not whether premises are presented in conditional form ("if") but whether they are set forth in the attitude of openness regarding their validity. Thus, an inductive premise may

5. We take this to be a deductive argument since the first premise is presented absolutely, even though the second premise is presented conditionally and is clearly evidential. If even one premise of an argument is deductive, it renders the entire argument deductive.

be stated unconditionally, but with the recognition that the premise may be wrong. The inductive issue is whether they can be supported by sufficient evidence or whether the converse premises could receive more evidential support, as well as whether they are are presented with the recognition that the premises *may* be wrong. Because the inductive premises expressed are conditional, the inferences would also need to be considered conditional, although again some might be inclined to view them as dogmatic. In addition, the logical test would need to be applied to the inferences: if one accepts the premises and if the inferences are validly drawn from the premises, they are unavoidable.

The Community of Faith's Role in Induction and Deduction

The previous discussion has focused on the individual's use of induction; however, induction also has communal implications. The church should be a community of biblical, theological, and moral discourse. Often such discourse is discouraged because those with a deductive, dogmatic spirit will not allow it. In such communities anyone who challenges views held by some or perhaps most of the members is made to feel unwelcome and even heretical; thus churches may lack the openness that should characterize true community.

The key to finding true community and unity is not to avoid issues that may carry different views; rather, it is to have open discussion and the freedom to challenge all premises and inferences on the basis of an evidential approach to the biblical text. This practice should be especially true for those who presumably subscribe to the supreme authority of the Scriptures for faith and practice.

Often a fallible person or group of persons control authoritarian communities. These leaders posit an ever-widening list of doctrines that one must hold if one is to be considered orthodox, with no questions asked. The so-called authorities stand between the reader and the biblical text, much as the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church did in the period immediately preceding the time of the Reformation.

The inferential process that lies behind the dogmatic positions taken is seldom exposed to the inductive tests of evidence and logic. Such a posture practically contradicts the claim made by these persons of Scripture's ultimate authority. The so-called authorities who stand between the individual and the biblical text, whatever their tradition, have become the ultimate authority. The call for an inductive spirit is a challenge to such a deductive, dogmatic, authoritarian approach.

Communities of faith, however, should not be completely latitudinarian. Christians can agree on many basic and vital biblical issues on the grounds of an inductive spirit and process. And room should always be left for communities with distinctives. At the same time, an inductive spirit is a call to exhibit love and respect while hearing the views of others, especially those

who are members of the community of faith. It is an acknowledgment that all have blind spots in relation to which the help of others is needed. Persons within particular communities should listen to others within and outside the particular communities of which they are a part, and specific Christian communities (traditions or denominations) should engage in conversation with other communities around the biblical text.

Principles Related to Induction

Two critical principles of inductive study as applied to the Bible are of particular significance for those who want to better understand and practice it. First, at the center of induction is the *principle of probability* over against absolute certainty; in an inductive approach, one must always speak in terms of degrees of probability.[6] This consideration is due to the evidentiary and inferential character of induction. For one thing, evidence is sometimes ambiguous; it will not always clearly lead to a specific conclusion. Moreover, evidence is sometimes conflicting; one piece of evidence may point to one conclusion, while another piece of evidence may point to a different conclusion. Further, evidence is often limited; more evidence may surface (one can think here of the massive amount of new evidence for biblical interpretation that came with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls or the Nag Hammadi library). Finally, our understanding of evidence may be limited; we need to realize that our construal of the meaning of evidence should be open to new insight.

This claim that an inductive approach to the study of the Bible involves probability should not lead students to a sense of interpretive agnosticism, that is, the suggestion that we really cannot speak confidently about the meaning of any biblical passage. One can arrive at an interpretation of at least the basic sense of almost all passages with a degree of probability so high that one can talk of virtual certainty. But some biblical passages do have a lower level of probability for interpretation; in such cases the student must acknowledge that the interpretation is relatively more provisional. Indeed, in some passages the evidence is inconclusive, with the result that students must suspend judgment regarding their meaning.

Second, students who adopt an inductive approach should embrace the *principle of reality*, which acknowledges that in fact pure or absolute induction does not exist. All of us have presuppositions. What is required is that we do all we can to become aware of our presuppositions and then intentionally expose these presuppositions to the biblical evidence with a willingness to change if the evidence requires. As Adolf Schlatter says, "We are freed from our presuppositions and lifted above them only when we are keenly con-

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6. Rudinow and Barry, *Invitation to Critical Thinking*, 212: "Inductive strength is relative, which means it *admits of degrees*" (emphasis original).

scious of them."[7] This attitude of radical openness to the evidence, wherever it leads, is the essential character of induction; we might call this attitude the *inductive spirit*. Clark Pinnock describes it well: "The lesson to be learned here is allowing the Bible to say what it wants to say without imposing our imperialistic agenda onto it; our exegesis ought to let the text speak and the chips fall where they may."[8]

In practice, of course, identifying all of the presuppositions that impose themselves upon our interpretation of a passage may be difficult, but two processes can assist. The first helpful process is to write out explicitly the lines of inferential reasoning. As we set forth our evidential premises and draw possible conclusions from these premises, we should be able to identify untested and previously unacknowledged presuppositions that have crept into our articulation of the evidence or our inferential reasoning toward conclusions. The second helpful process is, at the proper time, to engage in dialogue with others, including the use of commentaries. Others' interpretations will often present us with alternative interpretive possibilities and the evidence for these other possibilities, forcing us to confront the ways in which our own presuppositions may have intruded into our understanding of the evidence or our inferential reasoning toward conclusions.

7. Adolf Schlatter, "Atheistische Methoden in der Theologie," in *Zur Theologie des Neuen Testaments und zur Dogmatik, Kleine Schriften*, ed. Ulrich Luck, Theologische Bücherei 41 (Munich: Kaiser, 1969), 142, quoted in Peter Stuhlmacher, *Historical Criticism and Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 47.

8. Clark Pinnock, "Climbing out of the Swamp: The Evangelical Struggle to Understand the Creation Texts," *Int* 43 (April 1989): 155.