

Suggestions for Inductive Bible Study using the Seven Working Questions Who? What? When? Where? How? Why? So What?

1. If you are just beginning, start with a short book of the Bible written primarily as narrative. (Why? It's the easiest to begin with.) Suggestions might be Jonah or Ruth.
2. This work can be done on a computer, but I would suggest you try lined, loose-leaf notebook paper and use a pen. That will get you into the process. If you subsequently use a computer, the hand-writing process will alert you ahead of time as to how you wish to proceed.
3. Use a Bible that accurately translates the Hebrew and Greek texts.
 - a. In my opinion, paraphrases are out for serious Bible study. They tend to indoctrinate you with the editor's viewpoint. We want the original author's viewpoint, who wrote under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We do not want just another human's viewpoint.
 - b. Personally, I prefer the New American Standard Bible. It is highly accurate. The English Standard Version is not bad. The King James Version was a good version back in 1611, but the language is now four centuries old. Use the New King James if you prefer that text type. Personally I believe the text type behind modern translations is more accurate than the text type behind the KJV and NKJV.
 - c. I avoid modern translations that exhibit a neutered masculinity. I am talking about versions that translate "brother and sister" where the words "*and sister*" do not appear in the Greek text. Examples of this latter tendency, which I avoid, include NIV, Christian Standard Bible, and New Revised Standard Bible. Compare them with the NASB, for example, in 1 Thessalonians 4:13.
4. I suggest you avoid a Study Bible. You want to do your own, inductive work, not just regurgitate someone else's opinions. If you wish, you can see what a Study Bible says later on, after you have made your own decisions.
5. Using a Bible that clearly marks paragraphs, list the paragraph Scripture references of the book you have chosen. For example, if we are studying the book of Jonah, the paragraphs are as follows: 1:1-3; 1:4-9; 1:10-14; 1:15-16; 1:17; 2:1-9; 2:10; 3:1-4; 3:5-9; 3:10; 4:1-4; 4:5-8; 4:9-11.

6. In the left hand margin of your lined, college-ruled loose-leaf notebook paper (or legal pad, if you prefer), ALWAYS start each day by writing down the following:
 - a. Today's date. (This will come in handy later on.)
 - b. The reference of the Scripture passage you are studying. (Later on, there will be nothing more frustrating than having detailed notes, but having no idea what book of the Bible you were studying from or what paragraph in that book you were studying.)
7. ALWAYS number your pages. I like to use both sides of a page, and I number both sides.
8. Always leave a line at the beginning of your study of a certain paragraph for a paragraph TITLE. This will be ESSENTIAL in your final summary of what you have learned.
 - a. You will come up with a TITLE of the paragraph AFTER you have completed your inductive study of the paragraph. Why would you assign a title before you have studied the paragraph?
 - b. The title should, as briefly as possible, accurately summarize what is going on in the paragraph. For future purposes it may be helpful to include a noun (subject) and a verb (action statement) in your title.
9. When I am working through a paragraph, I like to make a note in the left-hand margin which verse I am talking about. It helps keep things straight. For example, if I am answering WHO? in Jonah 1:1-3 I prefer to do it this way:
 - a. 1:1 – Who? Lord, Jonah, Amittai
 - b. 1:2 – Who? People of Nineveh. (You may prefer Nineveh as an answer to the question “Where?”)
10. Write out answers as briefly as possible.
11. As you go along, you may develop your own short-hand for certain phrases.
12. Make sure you set aside time each day to do your own inductive Bible study.
 - a. This should be independent of any Bible studies you teach or sermons you prepare (if that applies to you). This is your own time with God in His book to you. Don't let anything deter you from your mission.
 - b. Adjust your time to the amount of time you have. I like to spend an hour a day, but that is because my profession allows me discretionary time. Make it work for you.

13. Don't get too bogged down in the questions. Important: Not every question will be answered in every verse or even in every paragraph. Typically, the most frequent questions that will be answered are
 - a. Who?
 - b. What?
14. "Why?" information is rarely given in a paragraph. That's where you have to use your imagination and do some extra research, perhaps.
 - a. For example, you will look in vain in the entire book of Jonah to find out WHY he didn't want to take God's message of judgment to the city of Nineveh. But to me, the answer to that question is essential to explaining the book of Jonah.
 - b. To me, answering the question "WHY" is exceedingly valuable in understanding a passage or a book of the Bible.
15. The last question I try to answer for each paragraph is "So What?" In other words, I have learned some information, but "So What?" What difference does it make in my life if I have learned this information or not? If I can't answer "So What," why should I study the Bible. This is the APPLICATIONAL question. Study without application is mere head knowledge, and that is dangerous.
16. Once I have studied through each paragraph in a book, I list all the paragraph titles in a vertical column. I include the reference for each title.
17. Next, I begin to group titles of a similar theme or flavor. These groupings must always be adjacent titles. I give a title to the various groups of titles.
18. Next, I group similar groups of titles. I assign a title to each group of groups. On a shorter book, that level will probably constitute the main divisions of the book.
19. I give a title to the entire book. Thus, I have created my own Inductive Outline of that particular book of the Bible.
20. For example, here is my "[Brief Outline of the Book of Nehemiah.](#)"
21. There follows below a schematic diagram of the process described in points 16-20 above. As outlined above, there are 13 paragraphs in the book of Jonah. So the following schematic is based on 13 paragraphs with titles.

Schematic of Grouping of Titles for Jonah

Scripture References	Abbreviated Title for each paragraph	1 st Grouping	2 nd Grouping
1:1-3	Disobedience	Disobedience. 1:1-3	Consequences of Disobedience. 1:1-17
1:4-9	Storm	Effect on sailors. 1:14-16	
1:10-14	Attempt to save life		
1:15-16	Successful sacrifice		
1:17	Great fish	Effect on Jonah. 1:17	
2:1-9	Prayer	Prayer. 2:1-10	
2:10	Disgorging		
3:1-4	Obedience	Mercy. 3:1-10	
3:5-9	Repentance		
3:10	Reprieve		
4:1-4	Angry protest	Object Lesson. 4:1-11	
4:5-8	Disrupted vigil		
4:9-11	Object lesson		

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Published on [WordExplain](http://WordExplain.com) on December 10, 2018
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