

BASIC QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

The questions below provide a concrete way for analyzing and understanding a passage. You don't need to answer all of the questions – they are meant to provide guidance only. The questions are grouped according to the type of book or passage. If an additional resource is desired, consult *How to Read the Bible For All It's Worth*, Gordon Free and Douglas Stuart (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1993).

General Questions

- ❖ What literary form does the text have?
- ❖ What words, images or symbols appear?
- ❖ What characters appear, and what are their relationships?
- ❖ What actions take place?
- ❖ What is the process of thought?
- ❖ Into what smaller units can the passage be divided?
- ❖ How does the form contribute to expressing the content?
- ❖ What is the characteristic style of the writer?
- ❖ What is the mood of the passage?
- ❖ What is the theme or main point of the passage?
- ❖ What laws of composition are used?
 - Repetition
 - Continuity
 - Contrast
 - Comparison
 - General to particular
 - Particular to general
 - Cause and effect
 - Climax
 - Clarification
 - Interrogation
- ❖ What crucial words or phrases need explanation?
- ❖ Are conjunctions used in a significant way?
- ❖ Are outside sources quoted in the passage?

- ❖ What led up to the passage?
- ❖ What follows the passage?
- ❖ For whom was the passage written, and why?
- ❖ How does the passage fit into the history of redemption?

Questions to Ask of Narratives

- ❖ How does the passage fit into Israel's history?
- ❖ How does the passage contribute to an understanding of redemptive history?
- ❖ Is there evidence of syncretism (corruption of Judaism with pagan religions)?
- ❖ Is a moral teaching stated implicitly? Explicitly?
- ❖ Does the passage
 - Simply record a historical event?
 - Establish a historical precedent, by mandating a normative model to be strictly followed? (Something is *normative* if it establishes a standard.)
 - Establish a repeatable pattern, but not necessarily a normative model?
- ❖ What does the passage teach about God's character?

Questions to Ask of the Law

- ❖ To whom does this law apply?
- ❖ What does the law illustrate about God's character?
- ❖ What social conventions are described?
- ❖ What is the purpose of the law (e.g. ritual purity, health, government or cult administration, avoidance of syncretism, etc.)?
- ❖ How does the law contribute to our understanding of God's Covenant?
- ❖ Is there a specific reward for keeping the law, or curse for not keeping it?
- ❖ Does the law function as a paradigm?

Questions to Ask of Poetry

- ❖ What characterizes the passage as poetry?
- ❖ What kind of parallelism is used, of the three basic types:
 - *Synonymous parallelism*: the 2nd line repeats the 1st, e.g. Is 44:22, "I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud / and your sins like a mist"
 - *Antithetical parallelism*: the 2nd line contrasts the first, e.g. Hos 7:14, "They do not cry to me from the heart / but they wail upon their beds"
 - *Synthetic parallelism*: the 2nd line adds information or detail to the first, e.g. Obad. 21, "Those who have been saved shall go up to Mount Zion to rule Mount Esau / and the kingdom shall be the Lord's."
- ❖ What does the poetry tell about the author and his character?
- ❖ What does the poetry illustrate about God's character?

Questions to Ask of Psalms

- ❖ What kind of psalm is it? (The Psalms are divided into various types, e.g. lament, thanksgiving, hymn of praise, salvation history psalm, psalm of celebration and affirmation, wisdom psalm, song of trust, imprecatory psalm, etc.)
- ❖ What is the psalm's place in Israel's history?
- ❖ How did the psalm function liturgically?

Questions to Ask of Wisdom Literature

- ❖ Is the passage in the form of poetry? (Many versions of the bible indicate poetry by indentation.) If so, what questions about biblical poetry are applicable?
- ❖ Does the passage describe the wisdom of God, or the "wisdom" of the world?
- ❖ What advice is given, and what is its function?
- ❖ What is the author's intention – to be taken literally, or to affirm a general truth?
- ❖ What is the point behind the author's specific instruction?

Questions to Ask of Prophetic Literature

- ❖ What is the prophet's background?
- ❖ Who is the prophet addressing?
- ❖ For what is the nation being commended or rebuked?
- ❖ What aspect of the Covenant is the prophet enforcing?

- ❖ What does the prophet promise as the consequence of the nation's behavior?
- ❖ In what way is the nation commanded to change its behavior?
- ❖ If it is a predictive prophecy, has it been fulfilled? If so, how?
- ❖ Are there any secondary fulfillments?
- ❖ How does this passage fit into the prophet's overall message?
- ❖ What does this passage tell us about God's dealings with Israel?

Questions to Ask of the Gospels

- ❖ What special emphases does the evangelist have?
- ❖ What does the passage tell us about the evangelist's community?
- ❖ How does the passage contribute to the evangelist's theological outlook?
- ❖ What are the parallels in the other gospels?
- ❖ Is the evangelist quoting an earlier source?
- ❖ If so, how has the evangelist used the source?
- ❖ What is the significance of the passage's placement in the gospel?
- ❖ If it is a teaching of Jesus, who was his audience?
- ❖ What forms (hyperbole, parable, etc.) are used, and how were they understood by the original listeners?

Questions to Ask of Parables

- ❖ What are the points of reference?
- ❖ What were the expectations of the listeners?
- ❖ What is the point of the parable?
- ❖ What would have been the reaction of the listeners?

- ❖ What is the significance of the parable in the gospel?
- ❖ Why was this parable preserved by the early Church?
- ❖ What does this parable tell us about the kingdom of God?

Questions to Ask of *Acts of the Apostles*

- ❖ How does the passage fit into the development of the early Church?
- ❖ How does the passage contribute to our understanding of the geographical expansion of the Church?
- ❖ What role does the Holy Spirit play in the passage?
- ❖ Why was this particular passage included? How does it function theologically?
- ❖ Does the passage:
 - simply record a historical event?
 - establish a historical precedent, by mandating a normative model to be strictly followed?
 - establish a repeatable pattern, but not necessarily a normative model?

Questions to Ask of the Epistles

- ❖ By whom was the letter written?
- ❖ To whom was the letter written?
- ❖ What is the author's prior relationship with the recipients?
- ❖ What is the author's attitude toward the recipients?
- ❖ What is the cultural/historical context of the author and the recipients?
- ❖ What does the letter tell us about the recipients?

- ❖ What concerns does the letter respond to?
- ❖ What is the progress of thought in the author's argument?
- ❖ What are the logical divisions of the letter?

Questions to Ask of *Revelation*

- ❖ What is the genre of the passage (e.g. Jewish apocalyptic, epistle, or prophecy)?
- ❖ If the passage is prophecy, has the prophecy been fulfilled historically?
- ❖ What imagery is used? Does the author explain its meaning?
- ❖ Is the passage intended as an allegory? If so, does the author reveal the interpretation?
- ❖ What was the political and historical context of the author and the recipients?
- ❖ How does the passage fit into the author's vision of the end times?
- ❖ How does the passage fit into the pattern of redemptive history?