

Inductive Study Method: Epistles (OLD VERSION)

Overview

1. Read the book all the way through writing down titles for each paragraph. This reveals the general thought development of the book. The titles should meet the following requirements:
 - The title should be short. No sentences are allowed. A phrase of a few words is the maximum length. We are not writing synopses. This will force us to get the main idea clearly fixed in our minds.
 - The title should cover all of the significant content in the paragraph. If there is subject matter that is not covered in your title, you need revision.
 - Decide how you will determine where the paragraph divisions belong. If studying with a study group, it is probably best to stay with the existing paragraphs. However, if convenient, it is often correct to divide the paragraphs in a different location than those used in any particular version. Feel free to discuss where the divisions should be, and why. (Remember that they are not inspired, and are different from one version to another).
2. Compile all the references to the author, audience and key 3rd party. This is usually done by drawing three columns on a sheet of paper--one for the author, one for the audience, and one for others. The data should be referenced with the chapter and verse, and marked with an asterisk if the insight is implied rather than directly stated. The implied data are less conclusive in reconstructing the historical situation.
3. Summarize their respective situations with a short paragraph.
4. Record your conclusions about the author's reason(s) for writing the book. Differentiate between major and minor reasons. Remember that this could affect the interpretation of some passages.

Specific Study (6 questions for each paragraph)

1. Language
 - Identify and define the key and difficult words and phrases. Perform word studies using concordances and lexicons. Look for parallel passages to help explain phrases.
 - In some cases, the style of the paragraph affects its interpretation. This is the case if the author employs sarcasm, parable, diatribe or poetry.

2. Historical

- How does your understanding of the historical setting affect your understanding of the words?
- Identify and explain any additional historical references.

C. Theological

- What does this paragraph teach about theological issues such as the nature of God, sin, man, Satan, salvation, the church, and the Christian life? It is important to limit your observations to the information in the paragraph at hand and the preceding paragraphs.

D. Strategic

- How does this paragraph fit into the overall purposes of the author for this book? Why does he write this paragraph? Why does he include it here? How does it relate to the structure of the book? This is the question which will give depth to your interpretation and ensure that your application is legitimate.

E. Contemporary Application

- How does what is taught in this paragraph apply to your world today? How does it affect your overall Christian world-view? What are its implications for the church? How does it contrast to the world-system?

F. Personal Application

- How does this passage apply to your own life and ministry? What are its implications for your sin problems, relationships and general spiritual growth? What are its implications in the same areas for the people in your ministry?