

# **Dr. David Bauer, Inductive Bible Study, Lecture 2, Inductive Methodology, Evidential, Firsthand, Holistic, Sequential, etc.**

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This is Dr. David Bower in his teaching on Inductive Bible Study. This is session 2, Inductive Methodology, Evidential, Firsthand, Holistic, Sequential, etc.

Okay, we're back. And we want to pick up here with number eight here, which is that the Bible study involves a serious concern for process. Before I do that, let me just say one more thing with regard to number seven, this business of interpretation, preceding and determining application; this perhaps needs to be nuanced a bit or qualified a bit because, in a sense, you cannot separate these steps or these phases of study. In other words, there is some application that goes into interpretation and there's some interpretation that, and of course, interpretation clearly informs application.

So, it's really more a matter of a spiracular sort of approach. That is to say that we begin with interpretation as a target. That is to say, this is a target here, but we recognize that all of us, of course, come to the interpretation of the Bible out of certain life concerns, life experiences, and the like.

And so, there's no way that we can hermetically seal or separate out our applicatory concerns from our interpretation work. But the point is that we want to begin by focusing upon what the writer was communicating to his original readers so as not improperly to bring our concerns, our contemporary concerns, into the interpretation so as to skew that sense of what the writers were attempting to communicate to their original audience. But as I say, keeping in mind that just to be realistic we cannot keep our contemporary applicatory concerns entirely separate.

That will be, as a matter of fact, the reason why we are concerned to interpret the text is because we have a conviction that the text has something to say to us. So, all that to say that application will of necessity or applicatory concerns will of necessity feed into our interpretation. We understand that, but it's helpful, we think, to focus upon interpretation and then to go ahead and to focus upon application as a target.

Now, incidentally, as we go ahead to apply, in practice, we'll see that at this point, we may gain greater insight into the original meaning of the text. So, as I say, it's not a matter of saying, okay, you're doing interpretation and only interpretation without any concern at all for applicatory possibilities. And then when you move to application, you're no longer concerned at all with interpretation, that is to say, with ascertaining the original significance of the text.

No, it's a matter of focus or target. But we do think it's important to differentiate these things in terms of focus or target. Otherwise, the application will simply be collapsed into interpretation.

And again, this is where ventriloquism tends to happen. We assume that the essential or the historical meaning of the text concerns the same things as concern us. And it may very well be that part of what's involved in the study of a biblical passage is that we'll see that the kinds of concerns, the kinds of questions that we have actually are not those of the text, and the text might actually be directing us away from those things that we bring to it to other aspects of meaning that we need to hear and we need to understand.

Now, as I say, we move on here to number eight. Biblical study involves a serious concern for process. Essentially, what we're suggesting at this point is that everything else being equal, the quality of results, how good our interpretation is, how helpful our interpretation is, how accurate our interpretation is, and our application too, that the quality of results is largely dependent upon the quality of the process.

Everything else being equal, the quality of the process will determine the quality of our interpretation and of our application. And that's why, as we say, we have to take seriously into account the process. What is the best way to study the Bible? Reflect upon that.

That's really a kind of necessity that's laid upon us by God, who has given us the Scriptures as our ultimate authority. Now, of course, we need to beware of what I've mentioned or called elsewhere, the mechanical fallacy, and that is the fallacy of thinking that Bible study can be reduced to mechanics, is reducible to process, so that it's only a matter of process. That is a fallacy, that is to say, that it is an invalid sort of point of view because the study of the Bible involves much more, of course, than the process.

As a matter of fact, it involves, for one thing, the attitude that we come to the Bible with. Do we come to the Bible with an attitude of openness to its message, radical openness to what it has to say to us? When we come to the Bible, do we come to the Bible as persons who are actually deep persons, who've experienced life deeply? Brevard Childs we mentioned Brevard Childs' first hour. Brevard Childs was asked how a person might become a better interpreter, and Childs' answer was to become a deeper, less shallow, better person so that the quality of a person's life has to do with how well one actually understands the sense, the essence of what is being communicated in the Scriptures.

And by the way, I might just mention here too, and this I often tell my own students when they're asking about how they can understand the Bible more deeply in a more rich sort of way. I think it's because, going back to something we mentioned a few moments ago in the earlier hour, and that is the Bible is theological, the better theological sense you have, the deepening of your faculties and theological thinking and theological reasoning will really help you much in the study of the Bible. Insofar as these biblical books are theological texts, the better theological mind, the better theological reason that you have, the better you'll be able to understand what is happening here. Now, of course, the Bible itself claims that spiritual things are discerned by the Holy Spirit and the Spirit-endowed person.

The spiritual mind understands the things of the Spirit that are communicated by the Spirit in the Scriptures. And so, there's really no substitute for Christian experience for understanding the Scripture in a deep way. Now, of course, that doesn't mean that one cannot understand the Bible at all unless one is a Christian unless one is a faithful Christian.

If that were the case, a Bible would have no evangelistic power or potential. It would never be a matter of a person picking up a Bible, say, in at least a North American setting, a Gideon Bible, but also, they're all around the world, in a hotel room, reading it for the first time without prayer, without any sort of Christian commitment, and coming to faith in Christ thereby. But to understand the Bible in depth really requires some actual experience of the realities that the Bible is talking about.

So, there is that personal experiential aspect that is also essential for understanding the Bible well. The ninth assumption is that the method that is best suited for the study of the Bible is one that is inductive. That is to say, is evidential.

And here, this really, in a sense, we're getting at the nub of the matter at this point, I need to say something about the meaning of induction or inductive. Now, these words are used in a variety of ways by people in general and even by philosophers and logicians and the like. So, it's very important for us to be clear in terms of what we mean by these terms inductive or induction.

By inductive, we mean essentially evidential, which stands over against a deductive approach. Inductive is an evidential approach. Deductive is presuppositional.

So, an inductive approach is one that comes to data with an openness to the evidence of that data, looks at the evidence in a fair and impartial way, and, on the basis of the evidence, draws conclusions from data. That is an inductive approach. Whereas a deductive approach is one that begins with certain assumptions, with presuppositions, and then comes to the data and reads those presuppositions into the data in such a way as to draw conclusions about the data on the basis, not of the

data itself, understood in a fair way on its own terms, but rather on the basis of presuppositions, the presuppositions with which we begin.

That is a presuppositional approach. That is a deductive approach. Now, this is actually, we talk about this as being an assumption.

This is also a conviction. But our conviction is that an inductive approach is better suited for the study of the Bible than a deductive approach on the basis of the Bible's own nature, the basis of the Bible's own character, largely because the Bible comes to us as a reality outside of ourselves. If we may personify the biblical text for a moment, the Bible is a reality that comes to us from outside of ourselves and seeks to speak a new word to us, a word that does not necessarily correspond to our presuppositions or assumptions but actually may challenge them.

Do you ever notice in your reading of the Bible that almost never does a biblical writer say to his audience, everything that you think, everything that you do, that you're doing is just right. Continue to do it. Almost always, virtually always in the Bible, the message of the text is a challenge to its readership.

There's something wrong. There's something deficient. There's something not quite right about the way you're thinking, about what you're doing.

And so, the message of the Bible actually challenges thinking and practices, and that's the way really the Bible relates to us. It does not simply conform to our presuppositions. It seeks to speak a new word to us, challenging our presuppositions, a new word that needs to be heard on its own terms in contrast to and often contradicting the presuppositions or the assumptions that we bring to it.

Luther actually referred, therefore, to the Bible as *adversarius noster*, that is to say, our adversary, by which he did not mean that the Bible is against us, but rather it stands over against us in order to speak a new and challenging word, challenging our presuppositions with a view then towards bringing our thinking into line with the point of view of the text. So, it's simply more realistic to understand the Bible in this way and to come to the study of the Bible inductively rather than deductively. Now, it is true, and this is something that we really need to emphasize, that none of us is without presuppositions.

We all have presuppositions. So that means, therefore, that there is no such thing as absolute or pure induction. All of us have presuppositions, but the challenge then and the obligation that's laid upon us is, as best we can, to identify the presuppositions that we have.

When we come to a biblical passage, it would be helpful to ask ourselves, what do I think this passage means? What do I assume it means? What do I expect it to mean?

What do I hope it means? What do I hope it doesn't mean? Those are presuppositions. That's a matter of identifying our presuppositions, and then having identified the presuppositions to expose those presuppositions to the evidence of the biblical text, being open to the possibility that those presuppositions may be challenged by this text, and being prepared to change our views, to change our ideas on the evidence of the biblical text itself. The key thing is not allowing presuppositions to determine conclusions.

We try to do all we can to avoid that. Adolf Schlatter, the great pietist New Testament scholar from the early years of the 20th century, has said that only when we become aware of our presuppositions can we really overcome them. Many people believe, as a matter of fact, there are some who actually would call themselves devotees of an inductive approach to the scriptures.

Many people believe that they do not have presuppositions, that they're entirely unbiased or unprejudiced when it comes to the biblical text. It is precisely those people who are most vulnerable to their presuppositions because they do not acknowledge them and therefore cannot really compensate, as it were, for them, in their study of the text, cannot actually intentionally expose those presuppositions to the evidence of the biblical text with a view towards changing their minds if, in fact, the scriptures require that. Now, the tenth assumption is that induction is facilitated by beginning with direct firsthand study and then moving, finally, to the interpretation of others.

When most people think of an inductive approach to the study of the Bible, they do think in terms of direct study of the Bible. As a matter of fact, some people have actually adopted a view, a definition of inductive Bible study, that inductive Bible study is synonymous with direct study of the text, and that as soon as you go then to reading other people's interpretations, like reading commentaries, at that point, you're becoming deductive. Now, on the basis of what we just said with regard to our understanding of inductive versus deductive, you understand that that is not our view of an inductive approach because, of course, for one thing, a person can engage in a direct reading or direct study of the text, not making use of any other resources, and still read it in a very presuppositional way.

So, direct study of the text does not necessarily mean that one is radically open to the message of the Bible in all of its differentness. That is to say, difference from our point of view in our presuppositions. On the other hand, conversely, when one goes to read commentaries or the interpretations of others on a passage, one can be truly inductive at that point.

One can still operate on the basis of a commitment to understanding the Bible on its own terms so that one does not leave or does not leave induction. One does not

become deductive simply by virtue of reading somebody else's interpretation of a passage. All that's true.

Nevertheless, we do believe that, as we say here, induction is facilitated generally by beginning with direct first-hand study and then moving to the interpretation of others. In other words, priorities should be given to the first-hand direct study of the text over reading secondary sources and what other people say about the text. Priorities should be given to that, both in terms of sequence and in terms of emphasis.

Typically speaking, one begins with the study of the Bible itself and then goes to what other people have said, what other interpreters have said about that, over against beginning, say, by going to the commentary and getting the answer from the commentary and then going ahead and maybe at that point going back to the text. Some years ago, I took a course on the book of Acts at another theological seminary, not here at Asbury, and it would have been possible to have gotten an A and earned an A in that course without ever having read one word of the book of Acts itself. The whole course was focused on what certain commentaries and scholars said about Acts.

It would have been possible, as I say, not to have even read the text of Acts itself. That course was misnamed. It should have been named not Acts of the Apostles, but literature or scholarly opinions on Acts of the Apostles, not on the book of Acts itself.

And it's really interesting that in universities or seminaries for that matter, but let's say colleges or universities if one were taking a course in Dickens or in Chaucer or in Milton or anyone, anything else, one would never think about teaching a course or experiencing a course like that where you would not read the primary sources. If you took a course on Milton, you'd think that primarily you'd read the works of Milton. But often, the Bible is not taught that way.

Often Bible study or Bible instruction involves a focus upon books about the Bible rather than the biblical text itself. And there are a number of reasons for that. Largely, the reason is that there's a, particularly in seminaries and in church settings, is that the message of the Bible is so transcendent, so divine, and is so difficult to understand.

Again, we talked about the fact that the Bible, the study of the Bible is difficult because it comes from a different culture and that it is divine, divinely inspired. That is to say, it involves the claim at least that God speaks to us, that God reveals himself through these texts. Because of that, the people, that people in general, people in the pew, cannot be trusted with reading the Bible for themselves and coming to understand its meaning for themselves, that they need the help of an authority.

And not simply the help of an authority, but an authority to give them the answer, an authority to give them the interpretation of these texts. Howard Tillman Kist, who taught inductive Bible study for years at Princeton Theological Seminary, said that, and of course, he was talking, he was writing actually in pre-Vatican II times, saying that even as a Catholic church at that time relied upon the church, the pope, the magisterium for the interpretation of the Bible so that at least many people in the Catholic church had the sense that in those years that the meaning of the Bible was to be derived not from their own reading or study of the Bible, but from what the authority, the church, the ecclesiastical authority told them that it meant, that even though the reformers had reacted against that kind of thing and had insisted that the Bible is addressed to the church as a whole, to persons in the church, and that Christians have sufficient capacity to understand the Bible on their own terms, that there's been what Kist referred to as a recatholization of Protestant theology. But rather than going to the pope for the answer, they go to the professor for the answer and go to the commentary for the answer in order to derive from the commentary what is the meaning of what is being said here.

But in fact, commentators do not have a kind of independent authority. The only authority a commentator or a scholar has is a functional authority, that is to say, insofar as a commentator or a scholar can help us to derive the meaning of the text for ourselves, does that commentator have any functional authority? The only value of a commentator, the only value of a scholar, is how that commentator or scholar can help us understand for ourselves and can help us in our own reading of the biblical text. So, what's wrong, really, with beginning with going to a commentary, pulling down a commentary from the shelf, and getting the answer from that, beginning that way? Well, there are really three problems with that.

One is, and this is a psychological truth if you begin your study of a passage or a book by reading what somebody else, what some scholar has said about it, you will be putting blinders or parameters around your own understanding of that passage. In other words, you'll be putting yourself down, putting yourself on a certain path of understanding that will be hard to break out of. It will be hard to see aspects of the meaning of that passage that differ from what you read originally.

All your subsequent work with that passage will in a sense be prejudiced by what you read from the commentator at the beginning. A second problem with that is that such a process robs you of the joy, excitement, and meaningfulness of firsthand discovery. There is, in fact, an excitement.

There is a formational possibility, potential. There is a level of meaning and understanding that comes with encountering or deriving truth yourself from the Scripture that you do not have when you get an idea or get an interpretation secondhand. It doesn't have the same level of ownership for you.

You don't have the same level of ownership of that truth, of that understanding, of that interpretation. You don't have the same level of joy and excitement in discovering it for yourself, and it will not have the same formational impact as if you discover it for yourself. And the third problem is that it really involves the misuse of commentaries.

Commentaries are not produced in order to be a substitute for your own study of the text. Their purpose, their intention is to aid you in your own study of the text, not to replace your own study of the text. So, it's not a matter of not using commentaries or secondary sources.

It's not a matter, as I said a few moments ago, of saying that when you go and read what somebody else has said about this book or this passage, you're no longer being inductive. That's not the point. That's not the issue.

As a matter of fact, secondary sources, the use of commentaries, for example, are an essential aspect of an inductive approach to the text. But the question is how best to use them and how most optimally to make use of secondary sources. In our judgment, for the reasons that I mentioned and others, it is best to begin with the study of the text itself, to do as much as we can with the direct study of the text, and then go to commentaries.

They'll be most helpful at that point, more helpful at that point, than if you begin with the use of commentaries to get the answer and really never do, or only subsequently do, your own serious study of the text. Okay. So, as I say, those are really the assumptions.

And we throw these out, I might mention, inductively. As I say, we don't want to come down as though we're saying that these are ideas or are notions that come directly from God himself. They do not come to us with the imprimatur of divine revelation or the like.

We are putting these forward for your consideration. And incidentally, we do hope that you will operate with an inductive attitude in everything that we do over these hours. It's not a matter of me standing up here and giving you the answer, the right answer, that you should believe simply because of who I am or what I've done or whatever, what kind of role that I have.

That's not the idea, where it's a matter of throwing these ideas out for your consideration. You really need to, you really need thoughtfully to consider whether you agree with these or not, whether they are helpful or not. But we hope you'll do so inductively.



That is to say, with reasons, with evidence. Say, okay, because of this, this, and this consideration, I think that what Bauer is saying here is not right. I think it's better to go in a different direction.

That is entirely fine. As far as I'm concerned, of course, it would be, would have happened whether it was fine with me or not anyway. But I'm just indicating here that I'm fully on board with that.

We understand that that is the case. And I hope that that's what will happen. I would rather that you do that.

That is to say that you engage in critical reflection about what I'm presenting rather than simply accept what I'm presenting as gospel without any serious critical reflection on it at all. Now, at this point, we want to move to what we might call the convictions regarding the chief characteristics of a sound Bible study. And again, as I mentioned just a moment ago, we're putting these forward as working hypotheses, not as gospel that has a kind of independent authority, but as working hypotheses that we are putting forward for your consideration.

We do hope that you will consider them seriously, though. Now, again, the first conviction is picking up on this business of induction, that it should be inductive. That is to say, it moves from an examination of evidence to conclusions, evidence in and surrounding the biblical text, to conclusions regarding the meaning, both the original meaning of the text and the contemporary applicatory meaning of the text.

Now, this really implies three things, and here we're going beyond what we said a few moments ago. The first is that it implies an emphasis upon openness, a radical openness to the evidence, and a commitment to follow the evidence wherever it leads, no matter how new, unexpected, risky, scary, strange, foreign, or textual.

Dr. Trena, under whom I studied here at Asbury in inductive Bible study, emphasized this notion of radical openness to the message of the Bible, radical openness to the message of the Bible. That's to say, to the evidence, to radical openness to the evidence, and to conclusions from the evidence, no matter where that may lead. Actually, it's precisely here that we get into the whole issue of the Bible's authority.

The Bible will be, is your supreme authority, is a supreme authority in your life if, in fact, you are radically open to its message, no matter where it leads, to the evidence of the Bible, to the teaching of the Bible based on evidence in and surrounding the biblical text, no matter where it leads. And this can be a risky thing. It may, for example, cause you to change your theology, which may mean that it may put at risk your position, your standing, even your ministerial work in a particular theological tradition or denomination or the like.

Of course, many people have, over the centuries, given their lives because they were convinced that the Bible was teaching one thing, when, in fact, the prevailing opinion on the part of powerful and sometimes violent ecclesiastical officials was something else. Indeed. Now, this implies, secondly, an emphasis on observation.

That is to say, and it suggests if, in fact, the approach is one from evidence, especially in the biblical text, to conclusions, it suggests it implies an emphasis upon becoming acquainted with the evidence itself, the evidence in the biblical text, and we encounter, we become acquainted with evidence in the biblical text that will be the basis for conclusions by observing the text, by actually observing what is there. We observe what is there before we consider as a target the meaning of what is there. You cannot actually deal seriously with the meaning of what is there before you've acquainted yourself with what is there.

And acquainting yourself with what is there is a process of observation, of observing the text. And then it implies, thirdly, an emphasis on proper and creative use of inferential reasoning. That is to say, an inductive approach, which, as I say, is an evidential approach, which involves a movement from evidence to conclusions, is very much concerned with the process of moving from evidence to conclusions, and that process involves inferential reasoning.

Now, that's kind of a technical term. That is to say, it involves drawing inferences from evidence. This evidence implies that the meaning of this text is such and such.

On the basis of the evidence, I conclude. The evidence points to, I conclude or I infer from this evidence that this is the meaning of this passage or this book. That means, then, that we must be very careful with regard to our logic of moving from evidence to conclusion.

Now, some of you at this point might be thinking, well, this sounds pretty technical and formal, but let me just point out that this is how we always, all of us everywhere, this is how we derive meaning from any passage, not just a Bible, but any reading at all, but certainly the reading of the Bible. Whenever you sit down and read the Bible, this is happening. You may not be consciously aware of it, but that's what you're doing.

When you read a passage, you are implicitly noting things in that passage and then drawing conclusions from it. Well, the question isn't whether this is happening or not. Inferential reasoning is taking place.

The question is whether how good it is, how good, how adequate, how reliable, how valid is this process that is going on anyway? By the way, quite often, and this is, of course, the essence of a deductive approach, you have evidence not really in the Bible but evidence that comes from outside the Bible. Let's say some notions of

personal experience or what I've heard from others. You have this extra-biblical sort of data that determines our conclusions rather than the data from the Bible itself.

Again, this would be a more deductive approach rather than a more inductive approach. So, the question is always, what is the evidence? Now, we think, too, that the second conviction is that it ought to be methodical—that is, methodically reflective.

What is the best method to allow the Scriptures to speak on its own terms? And, of course, we talked about that already. I just want to mention it here by way of emphasis. It should also, we think, be serious and intentional.

And again, we have talked about this already. Fourthly, we think it ought to be holistic and sequential. This is one of the chief characteristics of an inductive approach is that it is holistic.

It is comprehensive. Every valid, every relevant consideration that goes into an understanding of the biblical text is part of an inductive approach. It's holistic.

In this way, by the way, an inductive approach is not simply one method among other methods. One should not consider that you can study the Bible using the inductive method, quote, unquote, or using, let's say, a narrative critical method or a literary method or, as another option, a social scientific method or, we'll talk about these a bit later on, redaction critical method or source critical method. That is one method among other methods.

An inductive Bible study is not a method alongside other methods. It is an approach, a holistic and comprehensive approach that seeks to incorporate all these methods that are out there into the approach, into the process in the best way and at the most optimal time. So, as I say, it is holistic that way and also, but as I say, sequential.

But of course, broadly speaking, it is holistic and sequential, and that involves both interpretation and application in terms of concerns. In terms of procedures, it involves both individual direct first-hand study and also communal study, this kind of thing. Now, here, I do need to say something with regard to the relationship between individual encounters in the text and communal or corporate study, corporate encounters in the text.

Again, I think it's important to recognize that the method needs to be reflective of the nature of the Bible itself, and the Bible itself sometimes directs attention to individuals. You have in the Mosaic law, for example, you have side by side Mosaic commandments that are directed toward individual Israelites next to those that are directed toward the community as a whole. This is a subtle but, I think a profound way of indicating and communicating that this instruction has significance both for

the individual in the individual's life as an individual and for the community as a whole.

You find the same thing in the New Testament. In the epistolary tradition, the epistles of the New Testament, you have many times instructions being given to the whole church, but you also have a concern within the epistles for ministry or instruction to individual Christians and the like. Let me just draw your attention to Colossians here where you have at towards the end of chapter 1 of Colossians, and Paul is saying this in 1:28, him, that is to say, Christ, we proclaim, I'm using the RSV here, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom that we may present every man mature in Christ.

Again, the concern for the individual so that we recognize then that in terms of procedure, there is a place for individual encounter with the text. There is a sense in which all of us, or I should say each of us, stands as an individual before the text and the text is addressed to us as individuals. And therefore, there should be space given to individual encounter with the text.

Of course, we discussed that previously when we discussed the importance of direct study of the text. By the way, there is a practical or logistical consideration here. We often don't have any choice.

In other words, we do not always have a community about us in which we participate as students of the text. Sometimes, we simply don't have any choice but to study the Bible or to read the Bible for ourselves because there is no community or group there. When pastors for the most part, when pastors prepare for sermons and work with the Bible in sermon preparation, they do so in the privacy of their own study in terms of individual encounters with the text.

Of course, most people, most Christians, read the Bible themselves directly without a group providing the dynamics for understanding or interpreting the text. Therefore, it's important to learn to read the text for ourselves without the advantage of community assistance. But that's one aspect of it.

On the other hand, as we've mentioned already, there is a corporate aspect to the text as well. The text does not really address us simply as individuals but as a community of faith. Really, there's a sense in which the Scriptures have been written to the whole church, the church as a whole.

And it's really to the church, not just to individual Christians, but it's to the church that God has given the responsibility of interpreting the Scriptures. So, there is a communal aspect to it as well. And that communal aspect is quite important as well.

And for that reason, it is helpful to interact with others, particularly with others in the community of faith, regarding the message or the meaning of biblical passages. Quite often, we gain insight, not only through what others say but in the very process of discussing it with others, even coming to insights about the meaning of passages beyond what someone has explicitly said, simply by being part of the conversation. We gain greater meaning and insight into the meaning of the text.

And, of course, this relates really to the use of commentaries, which we really think is not an option. It's really an essential part of an inductive approach. It's not enough simply to read the Bible for yourself and come to a conclusion with regard to its meaning without consulting anybody else in the community.

And, of course, the most obvious place to go for getting a sense as to what the community of faith and the community of scholars and the community of readers have come up with in terms of the meaning of passages is to go to commentaries or works that deal with the interpretation of these passages. Commentary is the most typical form, of course, in which we find them. One of the real points of significance, of importance of communal study, not just direct communal study, let's say you have another, you have a group of persons who are right there next to you, you're talking with, but more indirect through the use of commentaries or the like, is that it provides some sort of, it provides some check over against a kind of idiosyncratic, that is to say, a peculiarly individual or an, let me say, an unreliable, of an unreliably individual interpretation of a text.

I suppose it's true in principle that when I work with a particular biblical passage that I may come up with an interpretation of that passage, which is true, which is accurate, which nobody else has ever thought anything, has, no one else has ever thought anything like. No one else has ever come up with anything like that interpretation, but the interpretation that I have, though it's different from what anybody else has ever thought about, may be right. In principle, that is possible.

In practice, I always thought that was highly unlikely. And that, so one of the things that I look for, for when I go to commentaries or to what scholars have said with regard to a particular passage, or what others, for that matter, have said with regard to it, is if there is some connection. It's not that my interpretation must be entirely collapsible or reducible to what someone else has said, without remainder, so that there's no room for any originality at all in my interpretation.

But if there's not some connection between my interpretation of the passage and what others have said, then, of course, I have to be suspect with regard to the interpretation that I myself thought was present. Incidentally, this business of individual and communal study also relates to the issue of whether there is a place for individual interpretations. That is to say, whether passages have only one single meaning, whether the meaning of passages may be somewhat larger than one single

meaning, whether passages may mean more than one thing, and whether individual differences in interpretation can reflect different aspects of the meaning of passages that may, in fact, be right.

I do not think personally that it's quite proper, at least precisely accurate, to say that every passage has only one single meaning. And the reason for that really is twofold. For one thing, passages are sometimes multivalent.

That is to say, passages sometimes may intentionally mean more than one single thing. Let me give you an example of this. If you turn to John chapter 11, of course, you'll find that in that passage, the shortest verse in the entire Bible is John 11:35, Jesus wept.

Now, actually, if you look at that passage in its context, take all the evidence seriously into account, that passage itself is multivalent. Multivalent, by the way, is a word that means more than one meaning or multiple meanings, multivalent. Sometimes, people talk about polyvalent, which means basically the same thing as multivalent, more than one meaning, many meanings, or the like.

But at least two meanings are possible here. Jesus wept. There is evidence in and surrounding this text that when we read Jesus wept, what John is suggesting is that Jesus wept for Lazarus.

That is to say, it was a weeping of grief. Now, of course, Jesus knew that he was going to resuscitate Lazarus. He knew that Lazarus was going to come forth from the grave.

That's true. But the resuscitation of Lazarus is not the same as resurrection. Resuscitation points towards resurrection, but of course, it's not resurrection because once one is resurrected, one does not die again, but Lazarus was resuscitated so that he did die again.

As a matter of fact, some people have said that Lazarus, in some ways, was the most unlucky person in the whole world because he had the misfortune of dying twice. But when John records here that Jesus wept, quite possibly, he is suggesting that Jesus wept for Lazarus. That is to say, it was a weeping, it was a lamenting of grief, the kinds of grief that we all experience as we stand before a newly prepared grave.

And by the way, and if this is, in fact, the case because Jesus was,, in fact,, weeping in the presence of death, he was experiencing grief. Lazarus was going to be resuscitated, but his first death actually pointed to the fact that he was going to die physically again in the face of Lazarus's death. If insofar as the passage suggests this, it actually gives warrant, gives approval for proper Christian grief.

It means that when we stand before the grave of a friend or a loved one and are in true mourning and are weeping, that is in no way necessarily a denial of or a betrayal of belief in the resurrection. One can embrace both a firm conviction of the resurrection and the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead and still grieve. Incidentally, just as a sidelight, the New Testament notion of the resurrection, of course, does insist upon the bodily resurrection of these persons.

We will see them again, but we will not have the same relationship then with them that we have on this side of death. We will have a greater relationship, a transcendent relationship, but not the same relationship, and so Christians grieve the loss of that particular relationship. Even though we know that there will be, in some ways, a better relationship, the relationship that we've had dies with the physical death of someone.

But there is equal, at least equal, evidence here around and surrounding John 11:35 that when we read Jesus wept, he was not weeping really for Lazarus, but he was actually weeping for the mourners. He was weeping for those who were weeping because he saw in their weeping, in the kind of grief, in the degree of grief of the mourners around the grave of Lazarus, he saw people who were not really embracing in the face of the death of a loved one, the whole notion of the resurrection. In other words, to some extent, they were grieving, to use Paul's expression in 1 Thessalonians, as those who do not have hope, who do not have the same hope.

Grieving for those who grieve in a hopeless sort of way. This then would lead to quite a different understanding of the meaning of this passage, and that is that it is a warning against a kind of grief that does not include, as a kind of ballast or counter-ballast to it, belief in the resurrection. But as I say, that's simply an example of a multivalent sort of understanding.

And you could, if you were going to preach on this, you could preach on it. You could really preach two quite different sermons on this same verse. Not contradictory meaning.

These two aspects of the meaning of John 11.35 do not contradict each other, but they are different. They are different and multivalent. Now, beyond that, you also have the principle of which I discuss actually in our book entitled Inductive Bible Study.

I'll mention this here, incidentally, as not to promote my own book, but I do want you to know that in terms of additional resources, we have produced a book entitled Inductive Bible Study. The subtitle is A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics, which Dr. Robert Traina and I have co-authored. And we talk about a number of these things as published by Baker Academic Press, incidentally.

We talk about a number of these things here within the book. But we mentioned in the book, we talk about it in some detail here, the notion of determinacy and indeterminacy. And here again, this is a kind of a technical expression, but the concept itself is pretty straightforward.

You actually have a range, or we might say a continuum, within the Bible. Some passages are on the determinate end of the continuum, and some are on the indeterminate end of the continuum. A passage that is relatively determinate is one whose range of possible meanings is quite narrow.

Even here, you do have a range, but there's not a broad range of legitimate possible interpretations. Those passages that are on the indeterminate end of the continuum have a much wider, broader range of possible legitimate, specific construals or interpretations. Now, notice that even in those passages that are relatively indeterminate, there are boundaries.

So, it's not a matter of passages meaning just anything. A passage that can mean anything means nothing. It's boundaries that give passages their meaning potential.

So, as I say, even indeterminate passages do have boundaries, and even determinate passages have range. Now, as I say, I think it's not quite precisely correct to say that every passage has only one single meaning, but there is a proper principle behind that statement, and that is what I just articulated, and that is that there are always limits or boundaries to meaning in any passage. So, a passage cannot mean just anything.

Every passage has a meaning, but that meaning may be broader in some passages and may be more narrow in other passages. Now, it's precisely because of the range of possible meaning, legitimate meaning, and legitimate interpretation that you have differences of interpretation, to some extent at least, with different people on the basis of individual backgrounds, individual experiences, different theological traditions, and different cultures. I, coming out of my tradition, my theological tradition in my North American culture, may be drawn towards a particular meaning or particular interpretation among a range of legitimate interpretations of a passage.

That interpretation is right, but it's not the only right one. These other ones do not contradict it, but they actually express more, a kind of fullness of meaning that I, because of the parameters of my own experience, background, culture, and what have you, do not see, at least do not see clearly or do not see immediately. Now, incidentally, of course, it's quite clear that the optimal situation here, the ideal, would be to be aware of as many of these potential meanings as we could be.



And this, again, is, expresses both what we mean by individual interpretation, so that you have, you know, different individual interpretations, each one being right, but also the importance of communal interpretation. I come to a more full understanding of the meaning of potential passages as I acquaint myself with what others in the community of faith have seen here and have said. There, and this, by the way, is where especially cross-cultural exposure is helpful.

We're going to come back to this in a moment, when we, in a bit, when we look at, when we talk about how to select commentaries or what to look forward to in commentaries, insofar as you have access to them. But as we look at what not only 21st-century people say, but go back and look at the fathers. What did the fathers, Augustine or Jerome or Irenaeus or Chrysostom, say about this passage? You really get a different perspective, because they are, they are speaking out of a different cultural context.

Or, as we in North America are intentional about reading African interpretations of passages, it helps us to come to a better, fuller understanding of the meaning potential of these passages and the like. So, both direct or individual, I should say, both individual and communal, and then in terms of resources, both rational and spiritual. Now, we talked, of course, about the importance of a spiritual sense.

Luther referred to this as *zaka*, that is to say, the substance of Scripture relating to the substance of my experience. That's how the spiritual sense helps us, helps us to understand the meaning, the depth of meaning of scriptural passages. But you have to understand, of course, that the Bible is in the form of rational discourse.

And so, we make no excuse at all, we make no apology at all, in terms of making full use of our intellect, of our rational, of our rational faculties. There are some Christians who believe that any, that there is a, that there is a deep wedge that should be driven between the use of the intellect, the use of the mind, and dependence upon the Spirit. The more we take seriously the intellectual or the rational faculties in an understanding of the meaning of God's Word, the less we are dependent upon the Spirit.

Perhaps even go so far, some of them would go so far as to say, that insofar as you engage in a rationally intentional way, the process of interpreting Scripture, the more you are resisting the Holy Spirit. That we ought to we ought to put our minds in neutral and just allow the Spirit to tell us what God wants us to know from this passage or this book. But again, we need to take seriously the principle that the method of the study of the Bible should reflect the nature of the Bible itself, and it's manifestly the case that by, that the Bible comes to us in the form of rational discourse.

As a matter of fact, often, frequently, typically, we might say, the Bible appeals to reason. Not just in the famous Isaiah passage, come let us reason together, says the Lord. But really, throughout the New Testament, there is an appeal to reason.

Therefore, by attending to the use of our rational faculties in the interpretation of the Scriptures, we are really submitting to God's methods. God has revealed, has chosen to reveal Himself in the form of rational discourse, and insofar then, as we make use of our rational faculties to understand what is being said here, we are submitting to God's method of revealing Himself. Now, of course, we do believe too that, and perhaps, But at this point, we really are saying something that needs to be developed in a fuller way, and that has to do with when we're talking about accuracy, on what basis do we determine what is accurate? Or can we even talk about an accurate interpretation? Is it right to say that one interpretation is right and another is wrong? That one interpretation is better than another interpretation? And if so, on what basis do we adjudicate? Do we make that evaluation as one interpretation is better than another? This really gets into the basic question, really a central question, and that is, what is interpretation? What is interpretation? Only when you address and answer the question, what is interpretation? Can you determine whether a particular interpretation is right or wrong, is good or bad, is better or not as good? We'll come back to that in the next hour.

This is Dr. David Bower in his teaching on Inductive Bible Study. This is session 2, Inductive Methodology, Evidential, Firsthand, Holistic, Sequential, etc.