

How Small Group Studies Work

Inductive Bible study is an approach to God's Word focusing on three basic steps that move from a general overview to specifics. Through these three steps, we apply inductive reasoning, which is defined as the attempt to use information about a specific situation to draw a conclusion.

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY STEPS

1. Observation
What does it say?

2. Interpretation
What does it mean?

3. Application
What does it mean for my life?

Inductive Bible study is a valuable tool in understanding and applying the principles of God's Word. Inductive Bible study can be done on many different levels. The shorter version is good for a brief devotional. The more extensive study is wonderful for digging deeper into the mind and heart of God.

A sample verse to illustrate the method is 2 Samuel 9:1: "David asked, 'Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?'" As we observe this verse and ask ourselves, "What does it say?", we see that David simply wants to know if there are any living relatives of Saul's that he may be kind to for Jonathan's sake. Whether or not there are any relatives or why David is asking is to be determined in the next step.

OBSERVATION

The first step of observing the verse is generally confined to a simple understanding of what the verse is saying. At this first step, there may be words or phrases that are unfamiliar to us, in which case checking different Bible translations is helpful.

INTERPRETATION

The second step—interpretation (What does it mean?)—requires a more in-depth examination than the first step. At this step, we want to be careful to find the meaning of the verse in its context. For our sample verse, as we look into the background of the incident we find that the relationship between David, God's anointed future king of Israel, and Jonathan, son of King Saul, was very close. Jonathan had saved

David's life when Saul was pursuing him (1 Samuel 20). David had described their relationship as "extraordinary" and he mourned Jonathan's death greatly (2 Samuel 1:25-27). In this context, we see David wanting to do something nice for any of his relatives who might still be alive. His love and loyalty were still strong even though Jonathan had been out of his life for some time. David did not sit passively and wonder about this; he took action and searched for these people.

APPLICATION

The third step in inductive Bible study is the practical application of the principles (What does it mean to me?). Among the ways we can apply our sample verse to our own lives is to see David's action as one of love and loyalty. We might ask ourselves: How loyal am I to my earthly friends and my heavenly Friend? Am I casual and passive about the relationships? Or am I willing to go out of my way to honor them? What can I do this week to let them know that I love them? Based on my detailed research, what did God communicate to me? Has He given me any commands, warnings, promises, or encouragement? Part of the application process is asking ourselves where we go from here. How can we use what we have learned from the passage in the future? A crucial part of any Bible study is asking God to implement the principles into our lives and praying for His wisdom as we go forward with this knowledge.

It is important to note that, while inductive Bible study or any other method is helpful to Christians as we delve into God's Word, ultimately it is the Spirit of God who opens the Scriptures to us because He has first opened our hearts to Truth. It is the Spirit who interprets spiritual truth to those who are spiritual. The natural man does not and cannot understand spiritual truth (2 Corinthians 2:12-14). So before attempting any Bible study method, we must be sure we have the Holy Spirit living in our hearts (1 Corinthians 6:19) through faith in Christ as Lord and Savior.

Introduction to the Life of Joseph

Joseph was the 11th son of Jacob, and his story is found in Genesis 37–50. As a 17-year-old shepherd, Joseph is something of a tattletale, bringing a bad report about his brothers to their father (Genesis 37:2). This behavior, combined with Jacob's overt favoritism towards Joseph, causes his older brothers to resent him to the point of hatred (37:3–4). Because of Jacob's open love for Joseph, his favoritism was begrudged by his other sons. And when Jacob presented Joseph with a highly decorated coat, he was hated and resented by his brothers all the more (Genesis 37:3). To make matters worse, Joseph begins relating his dreams—prophetic visions showing Joseph one day ruling over his family (Genesis 37:11–15). The animosity towards Joseph peaks when his brothers plot to kill him in the wilderness. Reuben, the eldest, objects to outright murder, so instead, the brothers sell Joseph as a slave and deceive their father into thinking his favorite son had been slain by wild beasts (Genesis 37:18–35).

Joseph is sold to a high-ranking Egyptian named Potiphar and eventually becomes the supervisor of Potiphar's household. In Genesis 39 we read of how Joseph excelled at his duties and became one of Potiphar's most trusted servants and was put in charge of his household. Potiphar could see that whatever Joseph did, God looked favorably on him and he prospered in all that he did. However, Potiphar's wife attempts to seduce Joseph, and when her advances are rebuffed, she falsely accuses him of attempted rape. Joseph, although innocent in the matter, is cast into prison (Genesis 39:7–20). In jail, Joseph interprets the dreams of two of his fellow prisoners. Both interpretations prove to be true, and one of the men is later released from jail and restored to his position as the king's cupbearer (40:1–23). Two years later, the king himself has some troubling dreams, and the cupbearer remembers Joseph's gift of interpretation. The king calls for Joseph and relates his dreams. Joseph predicts seven years of bountiful harvests followed by seven years of severe famine in Egypt and advises the king to begin storing grain in preparation for the coming dearth (41:1–37). For his wisdom, Joseph is made a ruler in Egypt, second only to the king (41:38–49).

When the famine strikes, even Canaan is affected, and Jacob sends ten of his sons to Egypt to buy grain (Genesis 42:1–3). While there, they meet their long-lost brother, whom they do not recognize. Joseph's brothers bow down to him, fulfilling the earlier prophecy. Joseph then reveals his identity to his brothers and forgives their wrongdoing. Jacob and his family move to Egypt to be with Joseph. Jacob's descendants stay in Egypt for 400 years, until the time of Moses. When Moses leads the Hebrews out of Egypt, he takes the remains of Joseph with him, as Joseph had requested (Genesis 50:24–25; cf. Exodus 13:19).

There is much to learn from Joseph's story. As parents, we have warnings concerning Jacob's favoritism and the effects that can have on other children as seen in Joseph's youthful pride and his brothers' envy and hatred. We have a good example of how to handle sexual temptation—run (Genesis 39:12; cf. 2 Timothy 2:22), and we have a clear picture of God's faithfulness. He does not forsake His children, even in the midst of suffering: "the Lord was with Joseph" (Genesis 39:3, 5, 21, 23).

There may be many distressing circumstances we find ourselves in, and some of them may even be unjust, as were those in Joseph's life. However, as we learn from the account of Joseph's life, by remaining faithful and accepting that God is ultimately in charge, we can be confident that God will reward our faithfulness in the fullness of time. Who would have blamed Joseph if he had turned his brothers away when they were in need? Nevertheless, God desires that we exercise mercy above all other sacrifices we may offer Him in our lives (Hosea 6:6; Matthew 9:13).

Perhaps most profoundly, Joseph's story presents amazing insight into how God sovereignly works to overcome evil and bring about His plan. After all his ordeals, Joseph is able to see God's hand at work. As he reveals his identity to his brothers, Joseph speaks of their sin this way: "Do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. . . . It was not you who sent me here, but God" (Genesis 45:5, 7–8). Later, Joseph again reassures his brothers, offering forgiveness and saying, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good" (Genesis 50:20). Man's most wicked intentions can never thwart the perfect plan of God.¹

¹ <http://www.gotquestions.org/life-Joseph.html> Copyright 2002-2016 Got Questions Ministries – All Rights Reserved. www.gotquestions.org

Joseph's Colorful Coat


 JOSEPH


Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him.

Genesis 37:3–4



DEVOTIONAL

With the history of Esau and his descendants concluded, Moses returns to God's chosen line. Today's passage begins with a short introduction, reminding us that Isaac's younger son was living in the land of Canaan when the history of "the generations of Jacob" began (Gen. 37:1–2a). Like the other genealogical lists in Genesis, this next section is not primarily about the father named in verse 2. Instead, Moses focuses on Jacob's twelve sons, especially Joseph.

The story of Joseph is familiar to us since it is probably among the first biblical narratives we learned as children and has even been adapted to both the stage and modern literature. We remember his maltreatment at the hands of his brothers, yet we often forget that Joseph was something of a spoiled young man. Early in his life Joseph associated himself closely with Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher, "the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah" (30:1–13; 37:2), and would come in from the fields to give his father a "bad report" about them. The Hebrew word for report in 37:2 is used elsewhere to describe false tales (Numbers 13:32), and some commentators believe Joseph was stretching the truth about his brothers, if not fabricating stories about them. Even if Joseph was not guilty of either of these sins, he was acting as the perennial unpopular tattletale and likely refused to cover minor offenses with love (Proverbs 10:12; 17:9; 19:11).

Jacob's favor for Joseph, the son of his favorite wife (Genesis 30:22–24), exacerbated this difficult situation. Loving him more than his other sons, Jacob made Joseph his famous coat of many colors (37:3). Actually, the Hebrew adjective describing the coat is uncertain here. It may have been a "long-sleeved" or "ornamented" coat as the translation "many colors" comes from the Septuagint, the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament. Whatever the robe's precise appearance, it was a regal garment that honored Joseph. Princess Tamar later wore a coat with the same Hebrew descriptor (2 Samuel 13:18).

Jacob perpetuated the sibling rivalry with his favor, and Joseph encouraged it with his attitude. Joseph's eleven brothers hated him intensely, for they envied their sibling's position (Genesis 37:4).

CORAM DEO (In the Presence of God)

John Chrysostom comments: "Envy is a terrible passion, you see, and when it affects the soul, it does not leave it before bringing it to an extremely sorry state" (Homilies on Genesis, 61.4). In due time the jealousy Joseph's brothers have for him will morph into a desire to kill him. Envy can indeed provoke a



great many sins. Do you find yourself jealous of another's position or power this day? Repent and ask the Lord to help you be content with where He has you.²



OPEN IT

1. Describe your family growing up. What set your family apart from the other families around you?



READ IT

Genesis 37:1–11



EXPLORE IT

2. Where were Jacob and his family living according to verse 1?
3. How old was Joseph when he is introduced in verse 2?
4. According to verses 3 and 4, what gift had Joseph received from his father?
5. How did Joseph's brothers respond?
6. What actions caused Joseph's brothers to hate him even more?

Genesis 37 begins the story of Joseph. However, in order to understand the home and world Joseph lived in, one must rewind and do some review.

JACOB'S MARRIAGES (GENESIS 29:27-30:25)

Arriving in Haran, Jacob saw a well where shepherds were gathering their flocks to water them and met Laban's younger daughter, Rachel, Jacob's first cousin; she was working as a shepherdess. He loved her immediately, and after spending a month with his relatives, asked for her hand in marriage in return for working seven years for Laban the Aramean. Laban agreed to the arrangement. These seven years seemed to Jacob "but a few days, for the love he had for her," but when they were complete and he asked for his wife, Laban deceived Jacob by switching Rachel's older sister, Leah, as the veiled bride.

² <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/josephs-colorful-coat/>

In the morning, when the truth became known, Laban justified his action, saying that in his country it was unheard of to give a younger daughter before the older. However, he agreed to give Rachel in marriage as well if Jacob would work another seven years. After the week of wedding celebrations with Leah, Jacob married Rachel, and he continued to work for Laban for another seven years.

Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah, and Leah felt hated. God opened Leah's womb and she gave birth to four sons rapidly: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah. Rachel, however, remained barren. Following the example of Sarah, who gave her handmaid to Abraham after years of infertility, Rachel gave Jacob her handmaid, Bilhah, in marriage so that Rachel could raise children through her. Bilhah gave birth to Dan and Naphtali. Seeing that she had left off childbearing temporarily, Leah then gave her handmaid Zilpah to Jacob in marriage so that Leah could raise more children through her. Zilpah gave birth to Gad and Asher. Afterwards, Leah became fertile again and gave birth to Issachar, Zebulun, and Dinah, Jacob's first and only daughter. God remembered Rachel, who gave birth to Joseph and Benjamin. If pregnancies of different marriages overlapped, the first twelve births (all the sons except Benjamin, and the daughter Dinah) could have occurred within seven years.³

FAMILY CRISIS (GENESIS 34)

The first crisis started when Jacob decided to settle his family near the Canaanite city of Shechem. Dinah was Jacob's only daughter; Shechem was the son of Hamor, king of the Hivites. Genesis 34:1 says that Dinah decided to visit the women of the land. When Shechem saw Dinah he slept with her. The text says he fell in love with her and wanted to marry her. This may well be the first case of date rape in the Bible. In retaliation Jacob's sons deceived the Hivite men into being circumcised and while they were recovering, Simeon and Levi entered the town and slaughtered every male, plundering and looting as they went, and carrying off the women and children. Jacob's response is hardly noble: "You have brought trouble on me." His only concern was that if the Canaanites heard about the slaughter of the Hivites, they would retaliate by attacking his family and wiping it out. To which the brothers reply, "Should he have treated our sister like a prostitute?"

To be honest, no one looks good in this sorry episode. But let's note one point: It happened because Jacob dwelt too closely to the Hivites in the first place. Dinah was fascinated by the Hivite women, which is why Shechem noticed her in the first place. It's a picture of what happens whenever believers begin to "love the world." Our call is to be in the world but not of the world.

When we are in the world—that's good. When the world is in us—that's bad.

Jacob's family is now in crisis because he ignored that simple principle.⁴

THREE DEATHS (GENESIS 35:1-29)

Now Jacob is back in the Holy Land. His first act is to return to Bethel, build an altar and order his family members to get rid of their foreign idols. God speaks to him once again and reaffirms that he will be the father of a great nation and that "kings will come from your body." He is also promised that he would inherit the land God had promised to his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac. All of this was God's way of saying, "Jacob, you're not perfect, but you are still my man. I chose you for a purpose and I'm not through with you yet."

At this—the moment of great spiritual victory—the very moment when God once again speaks to Jacob, tragedy strikes:

First, Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, dies and is buried at Bethel (35:8).

Second, Rachel dies in childbirth. With her last breath, she names him Ben-oni which means "Son of my trouble," but Jacob names him Benjamin—"Son of my right hand." Jacob buried her not far from Bethlehem and set up a pillar over her tomb (35:16–19).

Third, Jacob's father Isaac dies at the age of 180. He was living near Hebron and that's where Jacob and Esau buried him. The Bible says that when he died he was "gathered to his people, old and full of years."

³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacob>

⁴ Sermon by Ray Pritchard found @ <http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/1992-11-08-The-School-of-Suffering/>

That thought of being “gathered to his people” is an early hint of life after death. This, incidentally, is the last recorded time that Jacob and Esau meet. Many years earlier they had separated because of their father; now they had come together to bury him (35:27–29).

There is nothing remarkable in all of this, save the solemn reminder that if you live long enough you will attend a lot of funerals. No one lives forever. If you live to be 80 or 90, you’ll end up burying most of the people you know.⁵

REUBEN’S SIN (GENESIS 35:21 -22)

This story is told in simple terms: “Israel moved on again and pitched his tent beyond Migdal Eder. While Israel was living in that region, Reuben went in and slept with his father’s concubine Bilhah, and Israel heard of it.” Here we have a shocking breach of family values. The oldest son sleeps with his father’s concubine. Let pass for a moment the trouble we have with the whole subject of polygamy. God permitted it even though it was never his ultimate will for mankind. Wherever you find polygamy, you eventually find heartache and sadness.

Never mind all that. Concentrate on what Jacob’s oldest son did. He slept with a woman who belonged to his father. More than that, he slept with the mother of two of his brothers. We would like to know more—but the Bible is discreet as to the circumstances. It appears at first glance that Reuben has gotten away with it. All we are told is that “Israel heard of it.”

Dad knows what his son has done. He can’t forget the disrespect his oldest son has shown him. Years pass, then more years, and the incident is forgotten. No one ever brings it up. Now Jacob is on his deathbed. In his dying moments, he calls his sons to his side and blesses them one by one—blessings that will indicate their inheritance and their place in God’s plan for many generations. He begins with Reuben the oldest—who should receive a double inheritance. Listen to his words (Genesis 49:3–4):

“Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, the first sign of my strength, excelling in honor, excelling in power.” All seems to be well. Perhaps the old man has forgotten Reuben’s evil deed. But, no.... “Turbulent as the waters, you will no longer excel. For you went up onto your father’s bed, onto my couch and defiled it.”

There it is! He’s hasn’t forgotten. He knows his son—knows his strength, loves him as his firstborn, knows his turbulent, uncontrolled, untamed nature. A wild and undisciplined man, he never mastered his own impulses. In spite of his greatness, his power, and all his admirable qualities, Reuben has dishonored his father. Jacob never forgot what Reuben had done. On his deathbed, Jacob takes away Reuben’s birthright and leaves him with nothing but shame and humiliation.⁶

7. What are your first impressions of Joseph’s family and home life?

8. How can such events shape a young person’s worldview?

⁵ Sermon by Ray Pritchard found @ <http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/1992-11-08-The-School-of-Suffering/>

⁶ Sermon by Ray Pritchard found @ <http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/1992-11-08-The-School-of-Suffering/>

9. What events or circumstances have played a part in forming your worldview?
10. Jacob was a man who had experienced some amazing encounters with God, yet instead of seeing consistent spirituality, we see a life filled with chaos and sin. How are we to reconcile such a paradox?
11. What lessons can you learn from the turbulent life of Jacob's family? What steps could have been taken to have averted such difficulty?
12. What words of advice or counsel would you give seventeen-year-old Joseph in order to encourage him to have hope amidst so much trouble and pain?

GENESIS 37:2-4

Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children

These chapters stand out for the insight they give us into an obviously troubled family. From the beginning, we get the impression Joseph was sort of a pampered favorite of Jacob, who didn't mind tattling on his older brothers at all.

Also he made him a tunic of many colors

Jacob's favoritism of Joseph was plain to all, including Joseph and his brothers. As an outward display of this, he gave Joseph a tunic of many colors. This signified a position of favor, princely standing, and birthright. It was a dramatic way of saying he was the son to receive the birthright. The real idea behind the ancient Hebrew phrase for tunic of many colors is that it was a tunic extending all the way down to the wrists and ankles, as opposed to a shorter one. This was not what a workingman wore. It was a garment of privilege and status.

They hated him and could not speak peaceably to him

Jacob's favoritism of Joseph was an obvious source of conflict in the family. The brothers naturally hated him because the father favored him.⁷

⁷ <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/guz/genesis-37.html>

13. What are some of the reasons that Jacob might have favored Joseph over his brothers?

14. In what ways can parents show favoritism toward one child over another?

15. What can result from this type of parenting?

16. How can a parent keep from falling to the temptation of favoritism?

GENESIS 37:5-11

Joseph had two dreams in which the obvious point was that he would be elevated above his brothers. He told his family about those dreams. Some think he was wrong to do this. I would say that he was naive. He was a 17-year-old who lacked the wisdom and maturity that come with a few more years of life. To have shared these dreams in confidence with his father or with a trusted older friend may have been wise.

To share them with his brothers, who were already threatened by his favored position in the family, was naive and unwise. Many times a person like Joseph, who is very competent (as his later history shows), threatens others without even knowing it. It doesn't seem that Joseph shared these dreams to get a reaction out of his brothers. He seems innocent of any wrong motives. Even as he goes to check on them out in the fields, you get the feeling that he didn't expect any trouble. He thought they would be glad to see him. He even wore that hated coat. If he had any sense at all he would have left the coat at home. But I don't know any adult who can look back on his teenage years and say, "I didn't do anything dumb." We've all done stupid, immature, naive things in our younger days. It's part of growing up. Hopefully, if we have wise parents and listen to the counsel of older Christians, we'll minimize those youthful mistakes. But we all do a certain amount of stupid, naive things in our youth, in spite of wise counsel.⁸

⁸ Sermon by Steve Cole found @ <http://www.fcfonline.org/content/1/sermons/051897m.pdf>

17. In what ways were Joseph's actions with his brothers foolish? What tips might you have given to Joseph in that particular situation?
18. Put yourself in the shoes of the other brothers. How would you have felt upon hearing of the dreams of your younger over-privileged brother?
19. Why do the actions or accomplishments of others bother us so much? What causes us to become envious of others?

Thus begins one of the remarkable life stories of the Bible and all literature. He was loved and hated, favored and abused, tempted and trusted, exalted and abased. Yet at no point in the one-hundred-and-ten-year life of Joseph did he ever seem to get his eyes off God or cease to trust him. Adversity did not harden his character. Prosperity did not ruin him. He was the same in private as in public. He was a truly great man. (Boice)⁹

20. While experiencing great trouble (mistreatment by others), temptation (resisting sexual advances), and turmoil (unfair imprisonment), Joseph remained faithful to God. In what areas of your own life could you begin to exhibit the same character qualities that served Joseph so well?

⁹ <http://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/guz/genesis-37.html>