Adopted
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AN INDUCTIVE STUDY OF EPHESIANS ONE

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THE INDUCTIVE METHOD

The word “inductive” simply means to go from specific details to a general principle. Many popular teachers and authors use this method when presenting a Bible study as it is user-friendly. Anyone from the newest of Christians to the most seasoned and educated of believers can benefit from this approach. This does not mean that it is the only way to study the Bible, but it is what we will use.

The inductive Bible study method has five parts:

Observation – What does it say?

Interpretation – What does it mean?

Generalization – What’s the big idea?

Application – What difference does it make?

Implementation – What must I change?

These five parts each have questions that make taking apart a passage of Scripture and understanding it a pretty straightforward exercise. While this does not mean that there are not parts of the Bible that are difficult, it does mean that each of us – wherever and whoever we are – have at our disposal good tools for digging into the text.
BACKGROUND INFORMATION

(From How to Read the Bible Book by Book by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, p. 347-350)

Content: Ephesians is a letter of encouragement and exhortation, set against the backdrop of “the powers” (6:12). Portrays Christ’s bringing Jew and Gentile together into the one people of God as His ultimate triumph and glory.

Author: the Apostle Paul (some scholars question this on the basis of similarities between Ephesians and Colossians. They believe that Colossians is a Pauline letter and that someone else wrote Ephesians after reading it. The evidence for this belief is, however, slim. If you want more information about this, please talk to Marie. She can photocopy an article for you).

Date: 61-62 A.D., probably from Rome, while Paul was under house arrest. This is during the reign of the Roman Emperor Nero, who treated Christians terribly, submitting them to the tortures of being burned alive, eaten by animals in the Coliseum, run over by chariots, etc.

Recipients: uncertain; perhaps a circular letter to many churches in the province of Asia (Turkey), of which Ephesus is the capital (no city of address is given in the earliest manuscripts and Paul assumes that the readers do not know him personally).

Occasion: Tychicus, who is carrying this letter, is also carrying two letters to Colossae (Colossians and Philemon). Perhaps after reflecting further on the Colossian situation and on the glory of Christ, and knowing the Asian fear of “the powers of this dark world,” Paul writes a general letter for the churches of that area.

Emphases: the cosmic scope of the work of Christ and His reconciliation of Jew and Gentile through the cross. His supremacy over “the powers” for the sake of the church. Christian behavior that reflects the unity of the Spirit.

The churches of Asia (Turkey) are in a period of difficulty. Some outside influences are putting pressure on Gentile believers to conform to Jewish identity markers (circumcision, food laws, religious calendar). Others are discouraged, distressed by magic and the power of the demonic (“the spiritual forces of evil in the Heavenly realms.”) This makes sense in light of Ephesus housing the Artemision, a massive temple dedicated to the pagan goddess Artemis, and of the general oppressive atmosphere of this region, which was in many places given over to false gods.

You will hardly be able to miss the note of affirmation and encouragement in this letter. It begins with praise to God (in the form of a Jewish berakah, “blessed be God”) for the abundant blessings He has given in Christ (1:3-14). It carries on through the thanksgiving and prayer (1:15-23) and into the rest of the letter. The epistle also urges the recipients to maintain the unity God has provided through Christ’s death and the Spirit’s empowering. Paul concludes by urging them to stand boldly in Christ and the Spirit so as to withstand the powers that are still arrayed against them (the “Armor of God” passage).

Be on alert for the concerns that are revealed in Ephesians 1. You will see Paul’s passion for the Gentile mission and the reconciling of Jew and Gentile into one family of faith via Christ’s
sacrifice. You will also want to note how Paul’s Trinitarian experience of God lies behind everything. This comes out in the structure of the opening praise rendered to God: Father (1:3-6), Son (1:7-12) and Spirit (1:13-14).

1:1-14 – Paul usually begins with thanksgiving and prayer for the recipients, but here he starts with the blessing of God who has blessed them through Christ and the Spirit. Besides being aware of the Trinitarian structure (as noted above), you should observe how Paul introduces two of the major themes of the book: the Spirit’s blessings, provided through Christ, are showered upon the believer, who, because of this, can stand against the dark powers to whom he was once a slave. These blessings, especially redemption in Christ, have come to Jew and Gentile alike so that both together inherit the final glory of God.

1:15-23 – Here you find Paul’s typical thanksgiving and prayer. Notice how the prayer (for the Spirit’s enlightenment) functions to set the stage for the affirmation of his readers’ present position in Christ, who sits at God’s right hand as the Head. Notice how this echoes the Messianic Psalm 110.

Where is Ephesus? The province of Asia?

Who was Paul? (taken from “A Brief Guide to the Apostle Paul” at beliefnet.com)

Paul, whose original name was Saul, took the name familiar to us after his conversion to Christianity. Paul never met Jesus during his brief years of ministry. Nevertheless, he was perhaps Christianity's most important early convert and the first major missionary to preach the Christian gospel to non-Jewish people.

When and where did he live?

Scholars think Saul was born around 10 A.D. in Tarsus, in modern-day Turkey. Unlike Jesus'
other early followers, who were mostly Palestinians, Paul was a Roman citizen, which implies he was at least moderately well-off, and which granted him a certain respect wherever he went in the empire. He was a tentmaker by trade. After his conversion, he traveled extensively through most of the Mediterranean world. He died between 62 and 67 A.D.

**Was Paul one of the 12 apostles?**

No, he was not. However, the New Testament records that Paul did interact with many of the original disciples, especially in Jerusalem.

**Was Paul Jewish?**

Most scholars believe so, though they have argued about his commitment to Judaism both before and after his conversion to Christianity. Pauline writings indicate that he was raised Jewish and became a Pharisee (Romans 11:1, Phil 3:5). Acts says that in his younger days, Saul was involved in persecuting Jewish followers of Jesus because he believed they were heretics (Acts 22:4-5).

**What made him stop?**

According to Acts 9, 22 and 26, a conversion experience. Saul was traveling to the city of Damascus when he saw a bright light and heard Jesus' voice saying "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" He fell from his horse, blinded. Days later, after a visit from the Christian disciple Ananias, he recovered his eyesight and began to preach Jesus' gospel.

**Where did he go as he preached?**

At the start of his ministry, Paul spent much of his time in Jerusalem. Later, he traveled through Asia Minor, to Greece, and Rome.

**What made him different from other early disciples?**

When Paul started preaching, Jesus' followers were Jews who believed that Jesus had revealed himself as God's promised Messiah to his chosen people. They focused their ministry on sharing this remarkable news with other Jews. Paul made the radical departure of preaching to non-Jews (Gentiles), saying that, through Jesus, God had extended salvation to Gentiles.

**How much of the New Testament did Paul write?**

Thirteen letters, or epistles, of the New Testament begin with a formula like "Paul, servant of God, to [recipient's name]."

**What are Paul's most important contributions to Christian theology?**

One is justification by faith, the concept that humans are saved from sin by believing in Jesus. Jewish tradition focused on ritual observations and living according to Jewish law. Paul created a theological framework for understanding that Jesus' death and resurrection triggered a
fundamental change in humanity's relationship with God--a relationship in which faith, rather than behavior, was the central element.

This idea is sometimes described as "faith alone"--in Latin, "Sola fides." Justification by faith was one of the main points of difference raised by Martin Luther and other reformers that led to the Protestant break with the Roman Catholic Church.

**What is justification?**

The means by which humans are justified, or cleansed from sin and saved, by God.

**What are "works"?**

In the first century, "works" often referred to fulfilling Jewish ritual obligations. Paul felt that Jesus' coming made such "works" unnecessary for Gentiles, though they still had value for early Jewish Christians.

When theologians use the term "works" today, they mean good deeds, like helping the poor. The question active today is what the relationship between good works and faith is. The common understanding is that people are saved by God's grace, through their faith in Him, and that faith causes them to live rightly, or do good, because they love God.
QUESTIONS

Before you tackle these questions each week, please take the time to pray. Seek God’s wisdom and guidance as you study the passage.

Observation, Part 1 - Setting

- Read Acts 13-14, 19 and 21-28. This will give you the context for the letter to the believers in and around Ephesus. I realize that this is a lot of reading, but it is very important to our understanding.

Who is the author or speaker?

Why was this book written? What was the occasion of the book?

What historic events surround this book?

Where was it written? Who were the original recipients?

Observation, Part 2 – Context

What literary form is being used in this passage (i.e. – is it a letter, a poem, etc.)?

What is the overall message of this book, and how does this passage fit into that message?

What precedes this passage?

What follows?

Observation, Part 3 – Structure

Are there any repeated words? Repeated phrases?

Does the author make any comparisons? Draw any contrasts?

Does the author raise any questions? Provide any answers?

Does the author point out any cause and effect relationships?

Is there any progression to the passage? In time? Action? Geography?

Does the passage have a climax (the most tense part of the passage; when the point is made)?

Does the author use any figures of speech?

Is there a pivotal statement or word?

What linking words are used? What do they link?
What verbs are used to describe action in the passage?

**Interpretation**

Rule #1 – Pray.

Ask God for His guidance. Ask Him what the passage means. If you are truly seeking, He is always faithful to open your eyes.

Rule #2 – Continuity of the message.

The Bible has a unity to it and we must use the larger teaching of the Scriptures on a subject to help understand the meaning of a specific passage. This means that, once you have an idea of what the passage is about, you should look up others that deal with the same topic. Are they all saying the same thing? Do you need to adjust your thinking?

Rule #3 – Context of the material.

What does the rest of the book talk about? Always look at the chapter before and the chapter after, and even the paragraph before and the paragraph after. Also keep in mind historic and cultural context. Use your background information for this.

Rule #4 – Customary meaning.

What is the natural meaning of the text? What is the plain sense of it? Don’t try to seek out special hidden messages. They are rarely there. This doesn’t mean that poetic expressions and symbolism aren’t used, however. This simply means that you learn to distinguish between what is meant to be literal (“the Virgin will be with child and give birth to a Son” – Isaiah 7:14) and what is meant to be figurative (“the Lord is my shepherd” – Psalm 23:1).

Rule #5 – Background

Go back and read the information at the beginning of this study. For extra help, consult a commentary. You can find many for free online at places like StudyLight and BibleGateway.

From these five rules you should be able to interpret Ephesians 1. In this step you are going beyond “what the text is saying” to “what the text means.” Keep in mind that a text can never mean what it would not have meant to the original readers. This guards against reader our own ideas and beliefs into the Bible.

So – what does Ephesians 1 mean? Does it have more than one meaning? If so, how are these meanings shown (i.e. – how is the passage split between these meanings)?

**Generalization**

What is the author talking about? What is the subject of the passage?

What is he saying about what he is talking about? Why does the subject matter?

What is the overarching principle?
**Application and Implementation**

Is there a teaching here to be learned and followed?

Does this passage communicate a rebuke to be heard and heeded?

Is there a correction to be noted?

In what way does this passage train us to be righteous?

How do you need to respond to this passage?

Is there some area in your life that needs to change because of what you have learned?

What will you do to bring about this change?