



The Character Study

How to study the Bible for yourself

Lessons from the Lives of Others

- The Bible records something about the lives of more than 3000 people
- The Bible is very honest in what it records about each of these lives
 - The biblical record is inerrant—these are factually accurate and true stories
 - The biblical record is honest—the text records as much about sin and shortcomings as it does about righteousness and successes
- In fact, God wants us to learn from what He's recorded for us about the people in the Bible!

It Was Written To Instruct

- Rom 15:4, For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.
- 1 Cor 10:11, Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

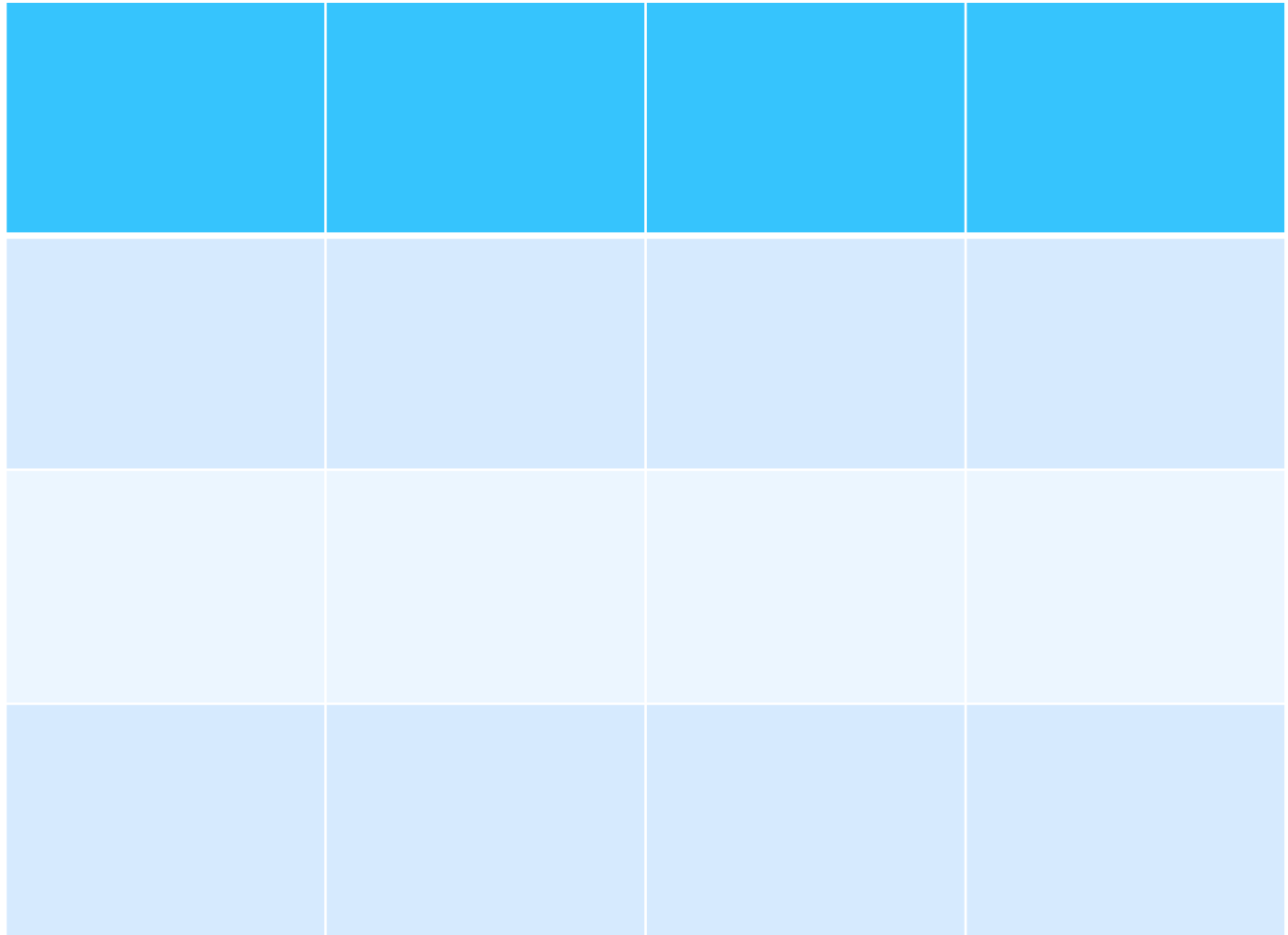
There Is Much To Learn from Historical Narratives

- The principle of preaching
 - Epistles contain instructions
 - Narratives contain illustrations
- The point?
 - When you study a character in the Bible, you are looking at biblical truth lived out—good and bad
 - In the epistles, you get a list of specific instructions on what to do or not do, how to do or not do it
 - In the narratives, you get an illustration of what it looks like and how it plays out in real life!

Proverbial Saying

- There are no useless lives—i.e., no one is truly good for nothing.
- Even the most wasted life is good for a bad example!!
 - Many illustrations of this in Scripture (Cain, Korah, Saul, Judas, etc...)
 - Ecclesiastes is an entire book about learning the lessons from his host of past mistakes
- That's why people make fascinating and profitable studies!
- Let me prove to you the need for a closer look—take 30 seconds on this next slide

How Many Squares Do You See?



How Many Did You See?

- If you saw less than 30, you missed some.
- There are:
 - 16 individual boxes
 - 9 squares of 4 boxes each
 - 4 squares of 9 boxes each
 - 1 square with all the boxes
- Most of us think we know the Bible when our attention to detail is about the same as it was here.

What Can We Learn from Character Studies

- You can learn a lot about how to succeed and how to fail in your life as a believer.
- You can learn a lot about the consequences of righteous and sinful choices and behaviors.
- You can learn a lot about the commonality of struggles people have in a fallen world.
- You can learn a lot about God!

How To Do A Character Study in 7 Basic Steps

1. Selection
2. Compilation
3. Introduction
4. Chronologization
5. Investigation
6. Summarization
7. Application

1. Pick a Character

- Pick a person of interest to study.
 - Pick a person you care about.
 - Pick a person you want to learn from—positive or negative (pos. is usually best for starters since you'll likely find negatives along the way regardless).
- Set the boundaries for the study for a major character.
 - Can be a textual limit (David in 1 Sam 16-31 or 2 Sam 11-12)
 - Can be a temporal limit (Moses when he was young, Exod 1-2; Heb 11; Peter during the life of Christ, Gospels)

2. Compile Textual References

- Put together a full list of verses that relate to this character
 - Use Bible S/W
 - Use a concordance, topical Bible or Treasury of Scripture Knowledge
 - Use your own notes and memory
 - Use the MSB Topical Reference
- Don't be afraid to list more than you need.
- Don't feel you have to be exhaustive—esp. for a first time or a major character
- Feel free to expand into the broader historical context he/she lived in

3. Introduce Yourself to the Character

- Read through your list of passages in canonical order from beginning to end without stopping.
- Write down a page or two of your first impressions—i.e., what caught your eye (your first pass of how many squares do you see).
 - What obvious stuff did you see
 - What new thing did you notice
 - What broader context details or questions did you observe

4. Chronology of the Character

- Read through all the passages again.
- Make a chronological outline.
 - For full character studies of significant characters, this can be from birth to death with significant events in between.
 - For lesser characters it may only relate to one historical event.
- This gives you a bird's eye view of the biblical record of the person you are studying, which helps you relate future observations and lessons to a time frame within that person's life.
 - E.g., consider the three 40 year phases of Moses' life.
 - He attempted to save Israel by his own hand in his first 40 years.
 - He was hesitant to be God's man in the next 40 years.
 - He was willing to follow Jethro's advice in the last 40 years.
 - Some have observed that Moses during each phase was learning something.
 - Phase 1, learning to be a somebody;
 - Phase 2, learning to be a nobody;
 - Phase 3, learning that God is somebody!
 - E.g., Saul/Paul
 - There's a significant difference between his pre- and post- salvation days
 - There's also a big difference between his early and later apostolic days

5. Investigation of the Character

- Make a list of questions, and read the texts again looking for answers to these kinds of questions.
- Write answers to these questions with their biblical references.
- Focus on the FACTS presented in the biblical record itself. Do not get inventive—be a true Biblicist.

Look for Biblical Evaluations

- What do people say about him?
- What does God say about him?
- What do his enemies say about him?
- What do later biblical writers or characters say about him?
 - E.g., Rahab is introduced as a harlot and a Canaanite in Joshua.
 - But, she's a privileged example of faith and obedience in Matt 1:5; James 2:25 and Heb 11:31.

Look for Textual Indications

- Does the text give his motivations?
- Does it indicate anything in the details that help explain spiritual successes or failures (e.g., 2 Sam 11:1-2)?
- Does it reveal anything about heart attitudes that resulted in behavior (e.g., 1 Kgs 21:4)?

Write a Character Evaluation

- Write up a brief summary of his personal and family background.
- Write out a list of the most significant events in his life—how he handled them (good or bad), and how they impacted him later.
- List the people he knew the best and how he related to them. Be honest with the textual data here (e.g., Paul and Barnabas/John Mark).
- Describe his personality and record how it manifested itself (good and bad) in the biblical record (e.g., Peter's mouth).

Do a Spiritual Evaluation

- Describe this person's relationship with God.
- Map his relationship with God through the course of his life (or at least the narrative).
- Did God teach him any lessons?
- Did God use him before, during or after the lessons—or throughout?
- Did he enjoy any benefits from suffering or obedience?
- Did he endure any consequences for disobedience?

6. Synthesize and Summarize

- Take all your notes and observations and put them together in an outline format.
- Write out a list of 1-3 (poss. as many as 7) key lessons you learned during the course of this study, and group your notes under each key lesson.
- Write out in one paragraph the heart of each lesson. Include details from the text and notes you've taken to support it.
- Now, do a 1 page summary outline of your lessons and supporting points with a single propositional statement that encapsulates the whole study.

7. Apply and Share

- Apply what you've learned to your own life.
 - Are there parallels you've seen with your own life?
 - Do you share struggles or strengths?
 - Did you learn lessons or hear a warning?
 - What specific change(s) do you need to make based on what you've just learned?
 - Commit to an action plan!
- Share what you've learned with someone else.
 - Use the summary outline for formal teaching/counseling/discipleship contexts.
 - Do it from memory and in tandem with your own life practices in parental contexts.

A Few Closing Tips

- Don't pick a main character for your first study—there's too much material to work through.
- Don't confuse characters who have the same name.
- Don't assume you're doing the definitive work—you can do this person again and learn more in the future.
- Don't fail to read and observe the actual text repeatedly—character studies by other authors are best saved for after you're done. But, once you're done, read one by someone else and see what you missed and what you saw that they didn't!!

Examples of Good Character Studies by Other Authors

- Herbert Lockyer
 - *All the Men of the Bible*
 - *All the Women of the Bible*
 - *All the Apostles of the Bible*
 - And others; feel free to use our library!
- John MacArthur
 - *Twelve Ordinary Men*
 - *Twelve Extraordinary Women*
- Note the way they cover all that is written in Scripture, and then draw principles from that material.