

Chapter Two

CHARACTER STUDIES

A. DEFINITION

Perhaps the most inspiring method of Bible research is character study in which the Bible is studied by considering the lives of the people portrayed in its pages. It is the least academic and most life-oriented means of study. Its benefit is primarily practical rather than doctrinal and thus can be a personally meaningful means of study.

B. IMPORTANCE

There seems to be widespread interest in biographies in secular literature. People quickly identify with the joys and sorrows, and the successes and failures of others. They find it easy to learn and draw strength from the lives of others. Thus, it seems quite reasonable that a Christian would be better off reviewing the lives of those who knew God, and especially those of whom the record is inspired by God.

The word “character” comes from a Greek word which means an impress, mark or likeness. It is used of both God and Satan in Scripture. Thus, in any person’s life we will either see the likeness of God and the impress of His dealings or the mark and likeness of Satan. Those who served God gave an example we should follow while those who did not set a pattern we should avoid. The New Testament writers found this to be quite valuable and often referred to Old Testament characters as examples (e.g. Jn. 3:14; Acts 7; Rom. 4; I Tim. 2:13-14; Heb. 3, 7, 11; Jas. 5:11, 17-18; II Pet. 2:15-16; Jude 11). If the focus of a character study is that person’s relationship to God then the benefit we receive will be greater insight into our own relationship with God.

C. METHOD

The procedure in a character study can be quite flexible depending on the character and the desired results. However, there are some basic steps that the student would do well to follow in any character study.

There are approximately 2930 individuals referred to in Scripture. Some of them are only referred to once and others hundreds of times. In choosing a character to study the student should consider the amount of references involved and whether the person is a positive or negative example. It would be wise to begin with characters one is already familiar with and feels somewhat drawn to. There are two cautions in order here. *First*, be careful not to confuse people who share the same name. (There are 30 Zachariahs, 15 Jonathans, 8 Judases, 7 Marys and 5 Jameses.) *Second*, be careful to identify the various names that may apply to one individual (such as Peter, Simon and Simeon).

Perhaps the best approach to a character study is asking and answering certain key questions. The following are some suggestions:

1. What is the meaning of the person’s name? A name will often represent a person’s character, experience or ministry.
2. What is their ancestral background? What kind of a heritage did they have?
3. What was the political, religious and cultural situation of their day? What was their environment like?

4. What great events took place in their lifetime?
5. Who were their friends and associates? A person is often known by his friends.
6. What character traits did they exhibit? (both positive and negative)
7. What were their failures and successes?
8. What influence did they have on those around them?
9. What was their relationship to God like?
10. What lessons can be drawn from their lives?

Note — It is important that the student not only follow through the Concordance and Bible for the *person's name*, but such should be noted in its *contextual setting*, whether verse, passage or chapter and book context.

Note — James P. Boyd's *Bible Dictionary* is strongly recommended as a resource book for definitions of Bible names, as well as other valuable information.

CHARACTER STUDIES

WORKSHOP #1

TOOLS NEEDED: Strong's Concordance, The New Bible Dictionary, I.S.B.E., Volume II and a King James Version of the Bible.

ASSIGNMENT: Do a character study on Enoch in the O.T. and N.T. using Hebrews 11:5 as a foundation text. Complete the steps as outlined below.

The student should first read the main chapters, or paragraphs in the Bible which deal with the person's life story. This gives a working knowledge of the character being studied. For Enoch they are: Genesis 5:21-24; Hebrews 11:5; and Jude 14, 15.

STAGE ONE:

Using your *New Bible Dictionary* make notes of the main facts given along with Scripture references.

Name —

Information —

Using your *I.S.B.E.* make notes of the main facts given, along with Scripture references.

Name —

Information —

STAGE TWO:

Using your Strong's and Bible, list Scripture references, their important details and any insights gained concerning the person

Scripture	Brief Verse Quote	Insights/Details

STAGE THREE

Suggested Questions:

Place main thoughts with Scriptures under the most suitable question.

1. *What is the person's name?*
2. *What is the interpretation of the person's name? Positive (a), negative (b).*
 - (a)
 - (b)
3. *What is the ancestral background?*
4. *What is the political, religious or cultural background?*
5. *What character traits does the person reveal?*
 - (a) *Negative —*
 - (b) *Positive —*
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.
 - 5.
 - 6.
 - 7.
6. *What prominent event transpired in the person's life?*
7. *What spiritual and practical lessons can be applied to the life of the believer from this character study?*
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.
 - 5.
 - 6.
 - 7.

CHARACTER STUDIES

WORKSHOP #2

TOOLS NEEDED: Strong's Concordance, The New Bible Dictionary, I.S.B.E., Volume II and a King James Version of the Bible.

ASSIGNMENT: Do a character study on Abel in the O.T. and N.T. using Hebrews 11:4 as a foundation text. Complete the steps as outlined below.

The student should first read the main chapters, or paragraphs in the Bible which deal with the person's life story. This gives a working knowledge of the character being studied. For Abel they are: Genesis 4, Matthew 23:35; and Hebrews 11:4.

STAGE ONE:

Using your *New Bible Dictionary* make notes of the main facts given along with Scripture references.

Name —

Information —

Using your *I.S.B.E.* make notes of the main facts given, along with Scripture references.

Name —

Information —

STAGE TWO:

Using your Strong's and Bible, list Scripture references, their important details and any insights gained concerning the person.

Scripture	Brief Verse Quote	Insights/Details

STAGE THREE**Suggested Questions:**

Place main thoughts with Scriptures under the most suitable question.

1. *What is the person's name?*
2. *What is the interpretation of the person's name? Positive (a), negative (b).*
 - (a)
 - (b)
3. *What is the ancestral background?*
4. *What is the political, religious or cultural background?*
5. *What character traits does the person reveal?*
 - (a) *Negative —*
 - (b) *Positive —*
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.
 - 5.
 - 6.
 - 7.
6. *What prominent event transpired in the person's life?*
7. *What spiritual and practical lessons can be applied to the life of the believer from this character study?*
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.
 - 5.
 - 6.
 - 7.