

The Biographical Method. *By Rick Warren*

Select a Bible character and research all the verses about that person in order to study his life and characteristics. Make notes on his attitudes, strengths, and weaknesses. Then apply what you have learned to your own life.

With the Biographical Method of Bible Study you select a biblical person and research the Scriptures to study his or her life and character. You try to become thoroughly acquainted with that person's inner life and find out what made it a spiritual success or failure. Ask God to help you think and feel with him or her so that your study becomes a life-changing experience.

Some Tips for a Good Biographical Study

To do a meaningful biographical study, keep the following pointers in mind.

1. Start with a person on whom you can do a simple study. Begin with one about whom there is a small number of references. Some biblical people can be studied in a few hours; others take weeks to study, and some major persons can take a lifetime. Do not start doing this study on a person such as Jesus, Moses, or Abraham. Begin with some minor but important people such as Andrew, Barnabas, or Mary of Bethany.

2. The secret of a good biographical study is to live with that person during the study. Walk in his or her sandals. Try to get inside their mind and see how they think, feel, and respond to circumstances. Attempt to see things from their point of view, hear with their ears, mingle with their friends, and fight with their enemies. Become that person while you are studying them. This is only possible if you spend much time with that person, reading, and rereading all the Bible references about them.

A friend of mine, Wayne Watts, has spent a lifetime studying Abraham. He has studied this biblical person so long that he has taken on many characteristics of Abraham. He is a great man of faith, as Abraham was.

3. Be careful not to confuse different people who have the same name when you look up the references about them. You will have to be sure that the verse is speaking about the person you have chosen to study. You would not want to confuse John the Baptist with John the Apostle or John Mark. For example, the Bible shows us that the following names were popular and refer to different people:

- Zechariah—30 different men
- Nathan—20 men
- Jonathan—15 men
- Judas—8 men
- Mary—7 women
- James—5 men
- John—5 men

The context of the verses will usually tell you which person is in view.

4. Be careful to find the various names that may apply to just one person. Since the Bible came out of a Hebrew-Aramaic-Greek context, some people's names changed in the different languages, in both the Old Testament and the New. The apostle Peter, for example, is known as Peter, Simon, Simeon, and Cephas. Daniel's three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, are better known as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Sometimes a name change came because of a character change, which was the case of Jacob becoming Israel. So be careful and find all the names used for the same person in your Bible study.

5. Stay away from books written about biblical people until after you have exhausted every Bible reference about that person and have drawn every possible insight out of those texts. Don't let a Bible commentary rob you of the task of personal discovery or prejudice your views of a person. Do your own work first, then

check other sources.

Biographical Study Form

1. Name

2. Scripture References

3. First Impressions and Observations

4. Outline of His or Her Life

5. General Insights (Answers to Questions)

6. Character Qualities Identified

7. Bible Truths Illustrated in His or Her Life

8. Summary of Lessons Learned from His or Her Life

9. Personal Application

10. Transferable Concepts (Ways I can share this with others)

11. Someone with Whom I Intend to Share This Study

General Questions for a

Biographical Study

Here is a list of 70 questions you can use in Step Five of the Biographical Method of Bible Study. You shouldn't try to use every question in a single study. Depending on the depth of your study and the time you have, select the questions you would most like to have answered. The questions are divided into seven major categories for easier use. As you think of other questions, add them to this list. (For convenience, the questions use masculine pronouns, so substitute feminine pronouns as needed.)

Reputation

1. Who wrote what we know about this person?
2. What did people say about him? What did his friends say about him?
3. What did his enemies say about him?
4. What did his family (wife, children, brothers, sisters, parents) say about him?
5. What did God say about him?
6. Why do you think God allowed this person to be mentioned in the Bible?

Tests of Character

7. What were his aims and motives?
8. What was he like in his home?
9. How did he respond to failure? Did he get discouraged easily?
10. How did he respond to adversity? Did he handle criticism well?
11. How did he respond to success? Did he get proud when praised?
12. How did he respond to the trivial and mundane things in life? Was he faithful in the little things?
13. How quickly did he praise God for the good or bad things that happened to him?
14. How quickly did he obey God when told to do something?
15. How quickly did he submit to God-ordained authority?
16. What was he like when he was alone with God?

Background

17. What can you discover about his family and ancestry?
18. What does his name mean? Why was he given that name? Was it ever changed?
19. What was his home-life like? How was he raised? Where was he raised?
20. What were the characteristics of his parents? How did they influence him?
21. Was there anything special about his birth?
22. Where did he live? What was his everyday life like?
23. Was he exposed to other cultures? Did they affect him in any way?
24. What was the condition of his country politically and spiritually during his lifetime?
25. What kind of training did he have? Did he have any schooling?

26. What was his occupation?
27. How long did he live? Where did he die? How did he die?

Significant Events

28. Was there any great crisis in his life? How did he handle it?
29. What are the great accomplishments for which he is remembered?
30. Did he experience a divine "call"? How did he respond to it?
31. What crucial decisions did he have to make? How did they affect him? Others?
32. Did any particular problem keep recurring in his life?
33. Where did he succeed? Where did he fail? Why?
34. How did the environment and circumstances affect him?
35. What part did he play in the history of God's plan?
36. Did he believe in the sovereignty of God? (God's control over all events)

Relationships

37. How did he get along with other people? Was he a loner? Was he a team person?
38. How did he treat other people? Did he use them, or serve them?
39. What was his wife like? How did she influence him?
40. What were his children like? How did they influence him?
41. Who were his close companions? What were they like? How did they influence him?
42. Who were his enemies? What were they like? How did they influence him?
43. What influence did he have on others? On his nation? On other nations?
44. Did he take care of his family? How did his children turn out?
45. Did his friends and family help or hinder him in serving the Lord?
46. Did he train anyone to take his place? Did he leave a disciple (a "Timothy") behind?

Personality

47. What type of person was he? What made him the way he was?
48. Was his temperament choleric, melancholic, sanguine, or phlegmatic?
49. What were the outstanding strengths in his character? What traits did he have?
50. Did his life show any development of character as time passed? Was there growth and progression there?
51. What were his particular faults and weaknesses?
52. What were his particular sins? What steps led to those sins?
53. In what area was his greatest battle: lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, or pride of life?
54. What were the results of his sins and weaknesses?
55. Did he ever get the victory over his particular sins and weaknesses?
56. What qualities made him a success or failure?
57. Was he in any way a type of Christ?

Spiritual Life

58. What personal encounters did he have with God that are recorded in Scripture?
59. What was his purpose in life? Did he try to bring glory to God?
60. What message did he preach and live? Was his life a message for or against Christ/God?
61. Did he live a separated life, distinct from worldly ways?
62. What did he believe? What great lessons did God teach him?
63. Why do you think God dealt with him the way he did?
64. What was his attitude toward the Word of God? Did he know the Scriptures existing at that time?
65. What kind of prayer life did he have? Did he have close fellowship with God?
66. Was he bold in sharing his testimony? Was he a courageous witness in times of persecution?
67. How big was his faith in God? How did he show it? Did God give him any specific promises?
68. Was he a good steward of what God had given him—time, wealth, talents?
69. Was he filled with the Spirit? What were his spiritual gifts? Did he use them?
70. Was he eager to do God's will, willingly and without question?