HOW TO DO A CHARACTER STUDY

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In embarking on a study of God's Word, perhaps one of the undervalued and underappreciated aspects of such a study is the characters portrayed in the Scriptures. There is much to be learned from an in-depth study of Bible characters. We can learn a great deal from those of whom God approved as well as from those of whom He disapproved. Furthermore, we may also learn from those whose roles in the Scriptures are seemingly innocuous. While we want to gain as much as we can from the Biblical text itself, it may also benefit us to consult secular sources to give us additional insight, yet always bearing in mind that these sources are not inspired.

Perhaps the very first thing to examine in a study of Bible characters is the name of the individual. Many people were given certain names to signify certain things. Jesus Himself was named *Jesus*, because according to the angel, "he shall save his people from their sins" (Matt 1:21). Sometimes over the course of a person's life, their name would be changed due to changing circumstances. Abram (exalted father) became Abraham (father of a multitude) in accordance with the promises of God (Gen. 12:1-3). Jacob's name was changed to Israel (Gen. 32:28), which means "prince of God," and it was that name under which God's people would be known.

Then we should ascertain if they are an Old Testament or New Testament character. Under which dispensation did they live? In the Old Testament, they lived in either the Patriarchal or Mosaic Age. Although the Mosaic age began at Mount Sinai in 1500 B.C., some God-fearing people, who were not Israelites/Jews, continued to worship God under the Patriarchal system. The Christian Age began on the Day of Pentecost, ten days after Jesus returned to Heaven (Acts 2). The time in which they lived could perhaps have great significance in conjunction with world events occurring at the same time.

The next thing we may want to consider is the nature of the individual's relationship with God and/or Christ. Does God consider this person righteous or evil? In some cases, it may be both. The individual may have at one time been evil, but became righteous (Luke 19:8), or vice versa (2 Tim. 4:10). Some Old Testament characters had a particularly close relationship with God (Enoch, Abraham, Moses), while some New Testament characters had a particularly close relationship with the Lord Jesus (Peter, James, and John). What was it about these individuals that made them particularly close to either the Father or the Son? Also, what can we learn from those whom the Bible describes as evil?

Where was this character born? Where did they live? Where did they die? Did they travel from place to place? Is there any special significance about any of these places? The names of places, as in the case of the names of individuals, often had a significant meaning in the overall revelation of God's will.

Is there anything particularly intriguing about their family? Noah and his family were the only righteous people on earth that escaped the flood (Gen. 7:7). In Genesis 12:1-3, God

commanded Abram to leave his home and his family in order to receive God's blessings. However, it is not until we read Joshua 24:2 that we are informed that Abram's father, Terah, was an idolater.

Many Bible characters were called for a particular purpose. God chose Jeremiah before he was even born (Jer. 1:5). For what purpose were they called? Was that purpose limited to the time in which they lived or would there be lasting ramifications as a result of their calling?

Studying Bible characters can indeed be a profitable examination. The Bible gives us a great deal of insight into many of these individuals recorded in Holy Writ. We may glean far more than we ever expected as we delve into the lives of these individuals. Almost every Bible character provides an example to either emulate or reject. As we study these characters we will hopefully acquire and maintain a greater appreciation of them and of Bible study in general.