



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

BIBLE FOUNDATIONS

How to Study a Person in the Bible

A Simple Method for Learning from the People God Reveals in Scripture

The Short Answer

Studying a person in the Bible means gathering what Scripture actually reveals about that person, understanding those details in context, tracing the person's life and relationship with God, and learning from the account without turning assumptions into facts.

FIND - Locate the passages where the person appears or is discussed.

GATHER - Read those passages together rather than building conclusions from one event.

CONTEXT - Understand the person's historical, cultural, covenant, and biblical setting.

OBSERVE - Notice what Scripture actually says about the person's words, actions, relationships, choices, and circumstances.

TRACE - Follow important patterns, changes, failures, victories, and growth across the person's life.

EVALUATE - Distinguish what Scripture approves, condemns, simply records, or leaves unexplained.

CONNECT - Place the person's story within the larger biblical story and consider legitimate connections to Jesus and the Gospel.

APPLY - Respond to the biblical truths revealed through the person's life.

The goal is not merely to collect interesting facts about biblical people. It is to understand Scripture more faithfully, know God more clearly, recognize the need for Christ, and learn from the real people whose lives God chose to include in His Word.

Romans 15:4 • 1 Corinthians 10:6, 11 • Hebrews 11:1-12:2 • 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Opening Memory Anchor

Study the person - but keep God and His Word at the center.



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PART ONE BEGINNER GUIDE

1. WHY STUDY PEOPLE IN THE BIBLE?

The Bible contains real people living through real circumstances. Some demonstrate remarkable faith. Others make devastating choices. Many do both. Abraham trusted God and also acted out of fear. David worshiped God faithfully and committed grievous sin. Peter boldly confessed Jesus and later denied knowing Him. Paul persecuted Christians before becoming a servant of Christ.

Their stories allow readers to see biblical truth lived out in human lives. Romans 15:4 teaches that what was written beforehand was written for instruction. First Corinthians 10:6, 11 points to earlier biblical events as examples and warnings.

But biblical people are not the ultimate center of Scripture. God is. A person study should therefore ask more than: WHAT CAN BE LEARNED FROM THIS PERSON? It should also ask: WHAT DOES THIS PERSON'S STORY REVEAL ABOUT GOD? And, where appropriate: HOW DOES THIS STORY FIT WITH GOD'S REDEMPITIVE PLAN THAT CULMINATES IN JESUS?

Memory Anchor

Biblical people are part of God's story - not the center of it.

2. WHERE DO PRAYER AND THE HOLY SPIRIT FIT?

At the beginning and throughout the study. Psalm 119:18 provides a fitting prayer: "Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law." Christians believe the Holy Spirit inspired Scripture (2 Peter 1:20-21) and helps believers understand and respond to God's truth (1 Corinthians 2:12-14). This is sometimes called illumination.

ILLUMINATION is the Holy Spirit's work in helping believers understand, receive, and respond to the Scripture He inspired. It does not mean receiving new Scripture. It also does not mean that every impression about a biblical person is automatically correct.

Pray for understanding, humility, wisdom, and willingness to be corrected. Then test conclusions by the biblical text. This is especially important in a person study because it is easy to imagine motives, emotions, conversations, or personality traits Scripture never reveals.

Memory Anchor

Depend on the Spirit. Build conclusions from Scripture.

3. WHAT DO I NEED TO BEGIN?

Very little.

THE BIBLE

Read the passages themselves.

A CONCORDANCE OR BIBLE SEARCH TOOL

Locate where the person's name appears.

CROSS-REFERENCES OR A TRUSTWORTHY STUDY BIBLE

Find related passages and understand basic background.

That is enough to begin. For major biblical figures, more specialized tools may eventually help, but a person study does not require an expensive library or advanced theological training. The most important resource remains the biblical text itself.

4. STEP ONE - FIND: WHERE DOES THIS PERSON APPEAR?

Begin by locating the person's biblical appearances. For a major figure, this may require several books. Peter, for example, appears throughout the four Gospels, Acts, Galatians, and First and Second Peter. He is also mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament.

A concordance, Bible search tool, cross-references, or study Bible can help locate passages. But searching a name requires care. Some biblical names belong to more than one person. There are multiple people named James, Judas, Joseph, Zechariah, and Herod. Confirm that each passage refers to the correct person. For a major figure, begin with passages where the person plays an important role rather than trying to analyze every passing reference at once.

5. STEP TWO - GATHER: WHAT DOES SCRIPTURE ACTUALLY REVEAL?

BACKGROUND

Where is the person from?

What family relationships are given?

What occupation or social position is mentioned?

What historical circumstances surround the person?

WORDS

What does the person say?

What questions are asked?

What beliefs, fears, desires, or misunderstandings are explicitly expressed?

ACTIONS

What choices does the person make?

How does the person respond to God?

How does the person treat others?

RELATIONSHIPS

Who influences the person?

Whom does the person influence?

Which relationships matter to the account?



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GOD'S INTERACTION

What does God say to or about the person?

Does God command, promise, warn, correct, discipline, rescue, forgive, restore, or commission the person?

Record observations before drawing conclusions. This keeps the study anchored to biblical evidence rather than impressions.

6. STEP THREE - CONTEXT: WHAT WORLD DID THIS PERSON LIVE IN?

Biblical people should not be removed from their historical setting. Ask: When did this person live? What was happening in Israel or the surrounding nations? Under which covenant did this person live? Was Israel united, divided, exiled, restored, or under foreign rule? What cultural practices matter? Where does this person live or travel? What happens immediately before and after the events being studied?

A map, timeline, study Bible, or Bible dictionary may help. For example, understanding Roman occupation, Jewish expectations concerning the Messiah, and first-century Galilee helps illuminate Peter's world. But background information should serve the biblical text - not replace it.

7. STEP FOUR - OBSERVE: WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY - AND NOT SAY?

Separate three categories: SCRIPTURE EXPLICITLY SAYS - facts stated directly by the text. Example: Peter denied Jesus three times (Matthew 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:54-62; John 18:15-27). REASONABLE INFERENCE - conclusions drawn from biblical evidence but not stated directly. SPECULATION - possibilities for which Scripture provides insufficient evidence.

Readers may imagine exactly what a biblical person was thinking or feeling during an event. Sometimes Scripture tells readers. Sometimes it does not. Do not turn an imagined motive, emotion, personality trait, or conversation into biblical fact.

Memory Anchor

If Scripture says it, teach it. If Scripture supports it, identify it as inference. If Scripture does not reveal it, do not pretend to know it.

8. STEP FIVE - TRACE: WHAT CHANGES ACROSS THE PERSON'S LIFE?

Do not freeze a biblical person at one moment. Look for early circumstances, important decisions, encounters with God, moments of faith and failure, consequences, correction, repentance, restoration, growth, later ministry or influence, and final biblical appearances.

This is especially important with Peter. Peter at his calling is not identical to Peter after years with Jesus. Peter at the Last Supper is not identical to Peter after denying Christ. Peter after the resurrection is not identical to Peter at Pentecost. Tracing the whole story reveals development that a single episode cannot.

9. STEP SIX - EVALUATE: DOES THE BIBLE APPROVE EVERYTHING THE PERSON DOES?

No. The Bible often describes behavior without prescribing it. DESCRIPTION tells what happened. PRESCRIPTION tells what should happen. This matters because Scripture records deception, violence, polygamy, revenge, cowardice, sexual sin, idolatry, unwise decisions, and family dysfunction.

The fact that a respected biblical person did something does not mean God approved it. Ask: Does Scripture commend or condemn this action? Does God respond to it? Are consequences shown? Does another passage clarify the moral issue? How does the action compare with God's commands elsewhere in Scripture? Biblical people should not be sanitized. Neither should every mistake define their entire lives. Scripture often shows both human weakness and God's remarkable grace.

PART TWO

WANT TO GO DEEPER? | INTERMEDIATE

10. A WORKED EXAMPLE - HOW CAN PETER BE STUDIED?

FIND AND GATHER - Begin with major passages such as Matthew 4:18-20; 14:22-33; 16:13-23; 26:31-35, 69-75; Luke 5:1-11; 22:31-34, 54-62; John 13:1-10; 18:15-27; 21:15-19; Acts 2; Acts 10-11; Galatians 2:11-14; and 1 Peter 1:1-9.

CONTEXT - Peter was a Jewish fisherman from Galilee. Jesus called him to follow Him and made him one of the Twelve. Peter lived under Roman rule and within the religious and cultural world of first-century Judaism.

OBSERVE - Scripture shows Peter leaving his nets to follow Jesus; walking toward Jesus on the water and then becoming afraid; confessing Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the living God"; misunderstanding Jesus' coming suffering; promising loyalty; denying Jesus three times; encountering the risen Christ; being restored and commissioned; preaching publicly at Pentecost; learning that the Gospel goes to Gentiles; and later being publicly corrected by Paul.

TRACE - A simple timeline might look like: CALLED → LEARNING → CONFESSING → FAILING → RESTORED → COMMISSIONED → LEADING → STILL GROWING. Galatians 2 shows that even after Pentecost, Peter could still act inconsistently and require correction. Spiritual growth is real. Spiritual maturity does not mean becoming incapable of failure.

EVALUATE - Peter's denial should not be excused. His confession of Jesus should not be ignored. His restoration should not erase the seriousness of his failure. His later correction should not erase God's work through him. The biblical account allows the whole person to remain visible.

11. WHAT DOES PETER'S STORY REVEAL ABOUT GOD?

This question moves a person study beyond biography. Peter's story reveals much about Jesus. Jesus calls ordinary people. He knows Peter's weakness before Peter recognizes it, warns Peter, and prays for him (Luke 22:31-32). Jesus does not treat Peter's denial as insignificant, yet Peter's failure is not the end of his story.

In John 21:15-19, the risen Jesus restores and commissions him. Acts then records God using Peter powerfully in the early Church. The central lesson is therefore not simply, "Try harder to be courageous like Peter." A deeper biblical truth is: Human weakness does not exceed the restoring grace and purposes of Christ. That grace does not make failure harmless. It makes restoration possible.

Memory Anchor

A good character study asks not only, "What did this person do?" but also, "What did God do?"



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12. CAN THIS METHOD WORK WITH A PERSON WHO APPEARS ONLY BRIEFLY?

Yes. Consider Rahab. Her biblical record is much smaller than Peter's, but several passages allow readers to study her carefully: Joshua 2; Joshua 6:22-25; Matthew 1:5; Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25.

FIND AND GATHER - Joshua provides the primary account. Later Scripture helps readers understand Rahab's place in the larger biblical story.

OBSERVE - Scripture reveals that Rahab lived in Jericho and hid the Israelite spies. Joshua 2 records her confession that the LORD had given Israel the land and that He is God "in heaven above and on earth beneath." She protected the spies and asked for protection for her family. Joshua 6 records her rescue when Jericho fell. Matthew 1:5 includes Rahab in Jesus' genealogy. Hebrews 11:31 remembers her faith. James 2:25 points to her actions as evidence of active faith.

WHAT SHOULD NOT BE ADDED? Scripture does not provide a complete biography of Rahab. It does not reveal every detail of her past, motives, later marriage, daily life in Israel, or spiritual development. A careful study does not fill those gaps with imagined scenes and then treat them as history.

CONNECT - Later Scripture helps interpret Rahab's significance. Her story includes faith, action, rescue, incorporation among God's people, and ultimately a place in the genealogy of Jesus. Peter demonstrates how to study someone with abundant biblical material. Rahab demonstrates an equally important principle: When Scripture gives less information, faithful study makes fewer claims.

Memory Anchor

Biblical silence is not an invitation to invent the missing story.

13. HOW SHOULD A PERSON STUDY CONNECT TO JESUS?

Not every biblical person is a direct "type of Christ." Avoid forced parallels. Instead ask where the person's story genuinely intersects with the larger biblical story. Some connections are explicit: Adam is compared with Christ in Romans 5:12-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:45-49; Melchizedek is connected with Christ's priesthood in Hebrews 7; David's royal line connects directly to messianic promises fulfilled in Jesus.

Other connections are broader. A person's sin may reveal humanity's need for redemption. A judge or king may demonstrate both the value and limitations of human deliverers. A faithful person may demonstrate trust in God's promises. A priest may help readers understand themes later fulfilled in Christ. Use the strength of Scripture's evidence to determine the strength of the claim.

14. WHAT ARE COMMON MISTAKES IN STUDYING BIBLICAL PEOPLE?

TURNING PEOPLE INTO PERFECT HEROES - Except for Jesus, biblical people are sinners. Do not erase weaknesses to make someone inspirational.

TURNING PEOPLE INTO VILLAINS TOO QUICKLY - One sinful action may be serious without explaining everything about a person's life.

PSYCHOANALYZING THE TEXT - Avoid assigning motives, diagnoses, personality types, or emotions Scripture does not reveal.

BUILDING ON ONE EVENT - Gather enough of the person's biblical story to avoid defining the person by one scene.

CONFUSING DESCRIPTION WITH APPROVAL - Something happening in Scripture does not automatically mean Scripture endorses it.

IGNORING HISTORICAL CONTEXT - Modern assumptions can distort ancient events.

MORALIZING THE STORY - "Be brave like David" or "have faith like Abraham" may contain truth but can miss what the passage primarily reveals about God and His purposes.

FORCING JESUS INTO EVERY DETAIL - Christ-centered reading follows legitimate biblical connections rather than imaginative parallels.

Memory Anchor

Observe carefully. Evaluate biblically. Resist speculation.

15. WHAT IF DIFFERENT BIBLICAL BOOKS EMPHASIZE DIFFERENT DETAILS?

That is normal. The Gospels sometimes select or arrange details differently because each writer has particular purposes and emphases. Kings and Chronicles also overlap while emphasizing different aspects of Israel's history.

Do not immediately assume that different details are contradictions. Ask: What does each passage explicitly say? What does each writer emphasize? Can the accounts reasonably complement one another? Does one passage provide information another simply omits? At the same time, do not invent details merely to solve every difficulty. Sometimes Scripture does not provide enough information to reconstruct every moment with certainty. Allow each passage to speak within its own context before combining the evidence.

16. WHAT ADDITIONAL TOOLS CAN HELP?

The basic tools from Part One are often enough: Bible → concordance/search tool → cross-references → study Bible. For deeper study, consider a Bible dictionary, Bible atlas, biblical timeline, reliable commentary, or original-language reference tools. A chronological list of passages can be particularly useful for major biblical figures.

Outside resources can clarify geography, history, customs, names, and difficult passages. But tools should remain servants of Scripture. The goal is not to collect everything others have said about a person. The goal is to understand what Scripture reveals.

17. WHERE DO OTHER CHRISTIANS FIT?

Personal Bible study should not become isolated Bible study. God gives teachers to His Church (Ephesians 4:11-16), and believers are called to teach and encourage one another with God's Word (Colossians 3:16). Character studies can be discussed with mature Christians, Bible-study groups, pastors and teachers, and trusted mentors.

Other believers may notice assumptions, missing context, or unsupported conclusions. No pastor, commentary, teacher, group, or Christian tradition has the authority of Scripture itself. But listening humbly to other Christians can strengthen personal study, especially when a person's story involves difficult historical, theological, or moral questions.



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18. A SIMPLE PERSON-STUDY WORKSHEET

PERSON:

PRAY

Ask for understanding, humility, and willingness to follow what Scripture actually reveals.

FIND

Where does this person appear?

GATHER

List the major passages:

CONTEXT

When and where did this person live?

What historical or biblical setting matters?

OBSERVE

What does Scripture explicitly reveal?

BACKGROUND:

WORDS:

ACTIONS:

RELATIONSHIPS:

INTERACTIONS WITH GOD:

TRACE

What major stages or turning points appear?

Does the person grow, change, repent, fail, or experience restoration?

EVALUATE

What does Scripture commend?

What does Scripture condemn?

What is merely described?

What conclusions are inference rather than explicit teaching?

What remains unknown?

CONNECT

What does this person's life reveal about God?

Where does the story fit within the larger biblical story?

Is there a legitimate connection to Jesus or the Gospel?

APPLY

What biblical truth should be remembered?

Is there an example to follow?

A warning to heed?

A truth about God to trust?

A response of worship, repentance, faith, or obedience?

19. QUICK PERSON-STUDY GUIDE

FIND - Locate the person's biblical appearances. GATHER - Read the relevant passages together. CONTEXT - Understand the person's biblical and historical setting. OBSERVE - Record what Scripture actually reveals. TRACE - Follow the person's story and development. EVALUATE - Distinguish what Scripture approves, condemns, describes, or leaves uncertain. CONNECT - Place the person within God's larger redemptive story. APPLY - Respond faithfully to the biblical truths revealed.

Memory Anchor

FIND the passages. GATHER the evidence. UNDERSTAND the context. OBSERVE the person. TRACE the story. EVALUATE biblically. CONNECT to God's larger story. APPLY the truth.

FINAL TAKEAWAY

Studying a person in the Bible is more than writing a biography. It is an opportunity to watch biblical truth unfold through real human lives. Scripture does not hide the failures of its people: Abraham feared. Jacob deceived. Moses disobeyed. David sinned grievously. Peter denied Jesus. Paul once persecuted the Church. Yet Scripture also records faith, repentance, courage, obedience, restoration, and God's extraordinary work through imperfect people.

Hebrews 11 remembers men and women who lived by faith, while Hebrews 12:1-2 immediately directs attention beyond those witnesses to Jesus. That provides a fitting pattern for every biblical person study.

Learn from the person. Notice the faith. Take the warnings seriously. Recognize the failures. Refuse to invent what Scripture does not reveal. But do not stop with the person.

LOOK FOR GOD'S CHARACTER. FOLLOW GOD'S PURPOSES. SEE THE NEED FOR GRACE. KEEP LOOKING TO JESUS.

The goal is not to make biblical people larger than life. The goal is to understand their place in the true story God has revealed - and through their stories, to know the God of Scripture more clearly.

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