

Why is it important to study the various characters in the Bible?

The Bible is filled with characters, literally and figuratively. Perhaps the best way to describe how the Bible portrays its characters is “human” because they are, in fact, human. The Bible is true, and the people that inhabit its pages were real people with real lives, real relationships, real joys, and real problems, just like us. The Bible does not shy away from presenting both the strengths and weaknesses of those it portrays. This makes the characters in the Bible “practical” in the sense that we can relate to them and educational in the sense that we can learn from their successes and failures.

Studying the people in the Bible is not merely about knowing historical fact. In their stories we learn about who God is, we recognize human tendencies, and we learn by example, both through positive examples and cautionary tales. Even in society today we recognize the power of story in learning about the lives of our contemporaries and our forebears. Since “all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17), paying attention to the people in the Bible is beneficial.

For example, from Adam and Eve we see the dangers of questioning what God has said and doubting His goodness. We see the tendency to shift blame rather than admit our own sin. We also see how to have joy in God’s forgiveness and promise of restoration. In Adam and Eve’s story, we see how God invites people into relationship and how He is merciful.

The patriarchs also provide valuable examples for us. Abraham demonstrates the value of

faith. We also see his failures when he lies and the consequences of trying to force God's plans rather than wait on Him. In Jacob we see that God is faithful to keep His promises, even to those who scheme. We see how our sinful tendencies can turn on us and cause us pain. We are warned against favoritism and see its broad-reaching effects.

In Moses' story we see that we can sometimes misunderstand God's timing or His ways and try to take on a righteous mission on our own, which doesn't turn out well. We see how God prepares us for what He calls us to. We also see God's patience with our fears and doubts. We come to understand the importance of following God completely and remembering that He is holy.

From Rahab and Ruth, we see that God invites all kinds of people into His plan, not just those of Jewish descent. We see that He is faithful to those who follow Him.

The kings of Israel have many lessons to teach us. In Saul we see the importance of obedience and humility. In David we see God's forgiveness. We learn that even when we sin terribly, we can turn to God and receive mercy. We come to understand the importance of calling out to God in any and every situation. We see complicated family relationships and warnings about attending to our families. In Solomon we see the value of wisdom as well as the foolishness of not applying it. We are warned of the dangers of others drawing our hearts away from God. In Ahab we see how corrupt leadership can affect a whole nation. In Hezekiah we see the wonderful results of faith in God even in seemingly impossible situations.

In Elijah, we see that we can sometimes feel alone. We see fear and depression. We also see God's provision and His faithfulness. In other prophets we see that serving God

often means being different or rejected. We see their deep experiences of pain that God used to give them compassion toward those He told them to warn. In this, we recognize that God has a heart of compassion, and we see His patience, His graciousness, His justice, and His holiness. We see the value of obedience and the importance of God's Word.

The New Testament is likewise full of characters we can learn from. In Peter we see impulsiveness as well as bold leadership. Mary of Bethany shows us the value of sitting at Jesus' feet and that Jesus is eminently worthy of our worship. Paul's life demonstrates the transformational power of God. We see how zealously following the Lord can lead to all sorts of reactions from others, practical hardships, consistent provision, and indescribable joys. Lois and Eunice demonstrate the value of training children and nurturing them in the Lord.

The list goes on. No matter your personality and struggles, there is someone in the Bible you can relate to and learn from.

The apostle Paul wrote, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). Ultimately, that must be our goal when we study Bible characters. Where they were successful in following God, we are to emulate them. Where they failed, we are to avoid making the same mistakes. "Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. . . . These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us. . . . No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (1 Corinthians 10:6-13).