

8 Biographical 8 Method of Study

Characters of the Bible were real people. Yet somehow they often seem less real than the people you see every day. You have never seen them. You meet them only in the pages of a book. Your life is probably very different from theirs. Archaeologists dig up bones of those who lived long ago; they find artifacts (tools and utensils used by people) which help us imagine what life was like hundreds (or thousands) of years ago. But this is still the dim past and is difficult to accept as real.

How can you get to know people of the Bible better? How can you really learn from the mistakes they made? How can you profit from their godly lives so that you inherit the promises they have inherited? How can you come to appreciate them as real though imperfect human beings like yourself? *Studying Bible people* will be the subject of this lesson.

lesson outline

Introduction to Bible Biography

Kinds of Biography

Simple Narrative

Narrative Exposition

Character Exposition

Argument

Summary of Biography

Procedure for Biographical Study

Collection of Data

Interpretation of Data

Organization of Data

Biographical Study of Amos

lesson objectives

When you finish this lesson you should be able to:

1. Use New Testament accounts to describe the present life of Old Testament people.
2. List four basic kinds of biography in the Bible and explain the author's reason for using each kind.
3. Define three basic steps in the procedure for biographical study and point out the sequence of them.
4. Make a textual biographical outline of the known life of Amos.

learning activities

1. Read the opening section, outline, and objectives.
2. Learn the meanings of key words that are new to you.
3. Read the lesson development and answer the study questions as you come to them.
4. Take the self-test at the end of the lesson, and check your answers.

key words

capsule	exposition
conspiracy	incidental
contemporaries	paradox
environmental	pertinent

lesson development

INTRODUCTION TO BIBLE BIOGRAPHY

Objective 1. *Use New Testament accounts to describe the present life of Old Testament people.*

Listen to the words of Jesus as He spoke to the crowd one day. “I assure you that many will come from the east and the west and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the feast in the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matthew 8:11). On another occasion, Jesus told the unbelieving Sadducees that God said, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Matthew 22:32). He is the God of the living, not of the dead.

Since this lesson is about the *biographical* method of Bible study, you are going to be studying about the lives of Bible people as they lived long ago. One way to help you think of Bible people as *real* people is to consider some Bible facts. The godly people you will meet in the pages of Scripture *are still living today*. This is the exciting message of Jesus Christ! Because He lives, He gives eternal life to all who come to Him (see John 5:24-26). Old Testament saints (godly people) as well as all those who put their faith in Jesus Christ are given eternal life by Him (read Romans 4). I often think it is not quite fair to study the lives of Bible people as they lived long ago (in all their imperfection, just like you and me) without understanding that they are *not* fixed in the state in which we read about them in the Bible. They have had centuries of eternal life, as earth time is figured, in which to learn, develop, and grow to perfection with the Lord Himself.

How do we know this? Well, the words of Jesus quoted above give us some clues. And there are other clues sprinkled throughout the New Testament. On one occasion, Jesus, speaking to the unbelieving Pharisees, was telling them some facts about Himself. He told them He was the *light of the world*. He told them that He *came from above*. He told them many things they did not want to hear. You can read about all this in John 8. In the next few paragraphs, we will emphasize some things in that chapter.

The Pharisees boasted to Jesus that they belonged to the family descended from Abraham. Jesus showed them that while they were Abraham's physical descendants, they were not really Abraham's children (vv. 33-39). Finally He said to them, "I am telling you the truth: whoever obeys my teaching will never die" (v. 51).

At this, they accused Him of having a demon! They insisted that their father Abraham had died (v. 53). Everyone knew that! But Jesus continued to speak of Abraham, showing that his life did not end with his physical death: "Your father Abraham," He told them, "rejoiced that he was to see the time of my coming; he saw it and was glad" (v. 56).

The Pharisees asked, "You are not even fifty years old—and you have seen Abraham?" Jesus replied: "I am telling you the truth . . . before Abraham was born, 'I am'" (vv. 57-58). These facts so infuriated those who did not believe that they tried to stone Jesus (v. 59).

Another time, Jesus revealed a little more about the activities of Abraham after his physical death. Luke 16:19-31 records a story Jesus told which is not like the parables because Jesus actually named the people involved. In this account, Jesus told of a conversation between Abraham and an unbelieving rich man who saw the beggar Lazarus being entertained by Abraham at a feast. So, as you study about Abraham from the Bible, keep in mind there is more to the story!

Moses and Elijah are living people. Hundreds of years after they left the earth, they were seen talking with Jesus on a hill.

They talked with Him on that occasion about His coming death. “Suddenly two men were there talking with him. They were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in heavenly glory and talked with Jesus about the way in which He would soon fulfill God’s purpose by dying in Jerusalem” (Luke 9:28-31). As you study about Moses and Elijah from the Bible, remember that there is more to the story!

Hebrews 11 gives many “capsule” life stories of Old Testament believers who lived and died in faith. The statement “it was in faith that all these persons died” (v. 13) indicates that these persons are still living.

No book could contain the accounts of all the life stories that started on earth and are continuing in heaven. But we find in Hebrews 12:22-24 a summary of life in heaven:

“You have come to Mount Zion . . . the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem with its thousands of angels . . . the joyful gathering of God’s first-born sons, whose names are written in heaven . . . to God, who is the judge of all mankind . . . to the spirits of good people made perfect . . . to Jesus, who arranged the new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood.”

As a believer, you are already a citizen of that great community! With these facts in mind, learn how to study about the people of the Bible. Learn faith from their faith. Learn from their earthly experiences as God intends for you to do. Follow in their footsteps to inherit eternal life as they have!

Application

- 1 Which of these statements is true?
 - a) Jesus spoke of life after physical death as being in the future only.
 - b) Jesus spoke of Abraham as a presently living person.
 - c) Jesus never referred to life after physical death.

- 2 Which of these statements is true?
- a) Moses and Elijah were not conscious persons after leaving the earth.
 - b) Bible characters were storybook figures only.
 - c) Hebrews 11 emphasizes faith above all else.
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KINDS OF BIOGRAPHY

Objective 2. *List four basic kinds of biography in the Bible and explain the author's reason for using each kind.*

Simple Narrative

Biographical information is in Scripture because of specific purposes the authors had in mind. Second Timothy 3:16 teaches that all Scripture is useful. God has inspired the writers to include information that He intends should be included. There appear to be four basic reasons why biblical authors included biographical information in Scripture.

The first reason is *simply to list the facts as a matter of record*. This is called *simple narrative*. It is simply telling the facts in story form. This is a common kind of biographical information found in Scripture, and it can be readily studied with reference to many different Bible characters. As you proceed, you will notice that the four aims an individual may have for making a study of the life of a Bible character are directly related to the same four aims the author had for including the information in the first place.

Narrative Exposition

The second reason for the author's inclusion of biographical information is to use the narrative (the story of a person's life) as *a means of teaching a historical lesson*. In this case, the facts are more than a simple record. They are there to teach. The entire span of the person's life is studied, with special attention given to the way God's dealings in his life affect his nation. When teaching a historical lesson is the purpose of the

biographical information, the story of the person being studied becomes incidental to the main theme of God's interest and care for His own people. There are fewer examples of this kind of biography to study because the number of people with crucial roles in history is limited. However, people like Daniel, Paul, Abraham, Isaac, Joseph and others can be included in this group.

Character Exposition

The third reason for the author's inclusion of biographical information may be to *teach character*. This is closely related to narrative exposition, but with a different slant. In this case the author is primarily interested in presenting the facts as they relate to the spiritual progress and character of the person being studied.

The kings of Israel and Judah lend themselves to this kind of study. The details of their lives are given in a very thorough manner along with God's pronouncements about them. These pronouncements are praise in some cases and stern condemnation in others. Many Bible people can be used for this type of study: disciples, prophets, and godly people from many walks of life whose stories are included in Scripture.

Argument

The fourth (and least common) reason for the author's inclusion of biographical information in Scripture is to *prove a point*. The facts of the individual's life are used to convince someone of something. Occasionally you will see this aim in evidence in the gospels concerning the life of Jesus, or in Paul's writings.

Application

- 3** Scripture contains facts about the lives of individuals (biographical information) because of
- a)** the element of chance.
 - b)** specific aims the author had in mind.
 - c)** their interest for readers.

4 Match each kind of biographical information (right) with the author's reason for using it (left).

- | | | |
|--------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| ... a | Simply to record facts | 1) Character exposition |
| ... b | To teach historical lessons | 2) Simple narrative |
| ... c | To teach character | 3) Argument |
| ... d | To prove a point | 4) Narrative exposition |

Summary of Biography

The basic steps for any kind of biographical study you do will be the same. The difference will be in *how much* material you can find, and *what kind* of material you can find. The author's purpose, which dictated what he saw fit to include, will strongly influence your purpose for study.

For any of the four types of biographical study you must read, observe, and make notes. Then, you should outline your notes to help you interpret the information you have collected. What you find, and how it lends itself to organization, will determine the main points in your outline.

If you were doing a *simple narrative*, just to cite the facts as a matter of record, the main points of your outline might be:

- I. Birth and Early Life
- II. Conversion and Ministry
- III. Relationships with Others
- IV. Character Evaluation
- V. End of Life Experiences and Death
- VI. Author's Purpose for Writing

Subtopics and details would be organized around this framework. You might not find facts for each of these categories available, but you would use whatever you could find.

The outline for the other types of biographical study will follow the same pattern. The emphasis will be different. In an *argument*, you will seek to understand what point the author was trying to prove. What was he trying to convince someone of? Who was he trying to convince? In a *character exposition*, the person's spiritual life and influence on others will be the main focus, and the rest of the information will be incidental.

Sometimes the same person is mentioned in more than one Bible book. In that case you almost need to have access to a Bible *concordance* to find all the information. A Bible concordance lists words of the Bible in alphabetical order, along with places in Scripture where each word listed is used. If you do not have a concordance, you will have to use the book method. That is, get all the information that is given in one book and build your study around that.

Application

5 Write **T** in the blank space before the following statements if the statement is true. Write **F** if the statement is false.

- ... **a** There appear to be four main purposes Bible authors had for including biographical information in the Bible record.
- ... **b** There are four completely different methods for studying about the life of a Bible character.
- ... **c** The basic steps in study are about the same for each kind of biographical study of a Bible character.
- ... **d** A Bible concordance is absolutely necessary for biographical study.
- ... **e** The basis for any study of a Bible character is very careful reading of the text, observing, and writing notations of what you find.



PROCEDURE FOR BIOGRAPHICAL STUDY

Objective 3. *Define three basic steps in the procedure for biographical study and point out the sequence of them.*

Collection of Data

The first part of the first step in a biographical study is careful reading. If you have access to a computer Bible program, you can simply run a search on the name of the person you want to study. The program will locate all places in the Bible where the name is found. If you do not have access to a computer Bible program, you can use a Bible concordance or simply read to collect information. Your skill in observation will be important also at this step. The information you find must be written down.

One author has suggested writing all the bits of information you find on small pieces of note paper. When it is time to organize the material in some form or other, the pieces can be shifted to suit the outline. The outline can be refined from the grouping of the papers. Whether you use that method or simply write in your notebook, the items discussed in the next two paragraphs are those you will look for.

Note every mention of names. Not just the name of the person you are studying, but the names of people and places with which he is associated. Write down all the actions (verbs) associated with the individual or those connected with his story. You will need to note the nature of the person's friendships and the period in which he and his contemporaries lived.

You should note any information about your subject's parents and other relatives. Write the circumstances of his birth, early training, home life, and the significance of his name or names. Your subject's later life is important too. Consider journeys, teachings, successes, failures, influence on his own or later generations. Find out all you can about the individual's personality traits, character, crises of life, and effectiveness in work. Observe, also, details about the lives of his children.

As you can see, the list of possibilities is long. You will not find complete information about every individual. In some cases, the information is so abundant that several kinds of study can be done. Other Bible characters are only mentioned, so no real study can be made of their lives. Some have well documented periods in their lives, but the rest of the information is missing from the record.

Application

6 To do a biographical study of a Bible personality, you need to read the book and make notes about

- a) all that has a bearing on his life or influence.
- b) all nouns and verbs whether related to him or not.
- c) what is said concerning him in nonbiblical books.

7 What is the first part of the first step in a biographical study?

.....

Interpretation of Data

The data that you have collected in the first step of your biographical study must be interpreted in the second step. The kind of material you have been able to find will determine what kind of study you can complete.

You may have a list of facts that are in the Bible just for the record. In that case, you will make your biographical study a simple story with the facts presented in an informative way. That kind of study is called *simple narrative*.

If the details of your subject's life are bound in some way to larger historical events, you will plan a *narrative exposition*. This would be a study where the narrative or story part of a person's life is used to teach a historical lesson.

If you find that the author has included a lot of information about the person's character, whether good or bad, his purpose will influence the purpose of your study. His purpose to teach

something about character will guide you in learning (and perhaps teaching) something about character. This kind of study is called *character exposition*.

In a few places, you may find that the author has included biographical information to prove a point. Remember that we have called this kind of information *argument*.

Organization of Data

Organization of data is the third step in the procedure for biographical study. For a *simple narrative*, you will classify the facts by categories. You were given the main points for a sample outline in an earlier section of this lesson. The subtopics and details will be organized around those main points.

Application

8 Look back to the section on Kinds of Biography; find the sample “main-point” outline suggested and copy it in your notebook. (If you wish to expand it or revise it in some future study, feel free to do so. Any outline is only a suggestion.)

For a *narrative exposition*, organize the material in terms of categories within each of the major periods of time in the person’s life. Each period would have a main heading. Anything that happened to him during a given time period would come under that period’s heading. For instance, in the life of Joseph (Genesis 37–50), a possibility would be to divide his life into three main sections: his early life with his family, his life as a servant in Egypt, and his life as a ruler in Egypt. The end point for each period would be the crisis that ushered in the next period. For Joseph, the section on his early life with his family would end with the crisis event of his being sold as a slave to the caravan heading for Egypt. The servant period would end with the crisis of his being able to interpret the dream for the king of Egypt.

Application

- 9** *Narrative exposition* is the kind of biographical study where the information is organized according to
- a) major periods in the person's life.
 - b) the person's friends and relationships.
 - c) birth and early training of the person.
-

Character exposition is written for the purpose of exploring a person's character and spiritual development. Therefore, it should be organized around categories related to character. The main topics might be centered on decisions made by the individual which were clues to his character. Subtopics under those major decisions might be personal influences or environmental influences that had a bearing on the decisions. Other headings might be his dominant personal traits, his major accomplishments, his religious experiences, and clues that might be found in his relationships with other people.

Application

- 10** A *character study* is primarily concerned with the
- a) major phases of a person's life.
 - b) individual's moral and ethical traits.
 - c) birth and early training of the person.
-

If you make a study of a person's life and you suspect that the author's biographical aim was argument, you will first want to try to find the answer to these questions: "What is the conclusion to which the author is trying to lead the reader?" "What is he trying to prove?" Then, you should try to answer these questions: "Are the biographical facts used to *illustrate* the argument? Are they used to *accent* the argument? Are they used to *prove* the argument?" Finally consider whether the *sequence* (order of events) of the narrative, the *moral of the narrative*, and the *character of the person*, in any way strengthens the argument.

Application

11 Read Acts 22. In this chapter Paul defends himself by giving his life story. When you have read it, answer the following questions in your notebook.

- a** What is the conclusion to which Luke the author is trying to lead the reader? Does this differ from Paul's aim in making the speech?
 - b** At the time of this incident, who were the people Paul was definitely trying to convince?
 - c** Are the biographical facts Paul sets forth used to illustrate, accent, or prove the argument?
 - d** Does the order of events have anything to do with the argument?
 - e** Does the moral of the narrative have anything to do with the argument?
 - f** Does the character of the person have anything to do with the argument?
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BIOGRAPHICAL STUDY OF AMOS

Objective 4. *Make a textual biographical outline of the known life of Amos.*

This section emphasizes application of biographical study. The outline which you will make for the book of Amos is different from the sample outline you were given in the section on *Kinds of Biography*. This will be a *textual* outline which will follow the Scripture references in sequence as they occur. The steps will be the same as for any of the biographical studies.

Step 1: Read the book of Amos to collect the information (data) that was discussed in the *procedure* section. Be sure to record the reference for every item of pertinent information you find, along with the item itself.

Step 2: Using your notes made in Step 1, try to decide what the purpose of Amos might have been for including

biographical statements in his book which is primarily prophecy.

Application

12 Write *purpose* in your notebook. After *purpose*, write what you think caused Amos to tell a little about his life in this book.

Step 3: Organize your textual outline. Divide a page of your notebook into four columns as you see here.

Biographical Outline of Amos			
References	Facts	Questions	Answers

The column headings really explain themselves. As you work through the following exercises, place your answers in the appropriate place on your notebook page.

Application

13 Write Amos 1:1 in the references column of your textual outline. Write six factual observations from this Scripture in the *facts* column.


14 What questions can you think of from these observations that are unanswered and you would like to find out more about? Write them in the *questions* column.

For *answers* to your questions, you go to whatever sources are available to you. You may find some answers in a week. Some may take you years to find, especially if you do not have books or maps to study from. Does this mean you should not ask the questions? No, if you wish to become a serious Bible student you must learn to ask questions. This may mean frustration if you don't have places to find the answers, but some day you may be able to locate more source material to use. The greatest scholar still has unanswered questions. So

write your questions even if the answers are not available to you at the time. For questions in the following exercises you will find answers in the textbook. Write your answers for these questions in the *answers* column, next to the questions. Then compare your answers with those we have suggested.

Application

- 15** Write Amos 3:8 in the *references* column.
- a** Write in the *facts* column an observation based on Amos 3:8.
- b** Read Joel 3:16 and Amos 1:2 then write this *question* in the questions column: What effects upon nature did Joel and Amos associate with God's speaking to man? Now, in the *answers* column write your answer to this question then compare it with ours.
- 16** Write Amos 5:1 in the references column.
- a** Write in the facts column an observation based on Amos 5:1.
- b** With reference to the observation we have made in this exercise, write this question in the questions column: Why? Now, read Amos 5:3; then in the answers column write your answer to this question.
- 17** In Amos 7:1, 3, 7; and 8:1 there is mentioned four times something which gives us personal information about this prophet. Write this information in the *fact* column.
- 18** Write Amos 7:10 in the *references* column. Now write in the facts column an observation based on this verse.
- 19** Read Amos 7:14 carefully. Find three facts from your observation of this verse and list them in the *facts* column.



What kind of biography does Amos 7:14 seem to be? Is it *simple narrative*, *narrative exposition*, *character exposition*, or *argument*? Primarily, it seems to be argument.

Application

20 In the *questions* column next to the facts you listed for Amos 7:14, write this question: What is Amos trying to prove in his argument? Now, in the *answers* column write your answer to this question.



self-test

Circle the letter in front of the item in each question which is the best answer.

- 1** Which of the following statements accurately describes characters of the Bible?
 - a)** They never did live in reality.
 - b)** They are not living now.
 - c)** They are still alive today.

- 2** Which of the following items is NOT one of the basic kinds of biography in the Bible?
 - a)** Collection of data.
 - b)** Character exposition.
 - c)** Argument.
 - d)** Simple narrative.

- 3** The primary emphasis of narrative exposition is to
 - a)** prove a point.
 - b)** teach historical lessons.
 - c)** teach character.

- 4** In the procedure for biographical study, you begin to read the material when you begin to
 - a)** organize your data.
 - b)** collect your data.
 - c)** make your textual outline.

- 5** The chronological order in which you will work with your information in a biographical study is
 - a)** collection, organization, interpretation.
 - b)** organization, interpretation, collection.
 - c)** interpretation, collection, organization.
 - d)** collection, interpretation, organization.

- 6** Our study of the book of Amos in this lesson has emphasized most the
 - a)** application of biographical study.
 - b)** introduction to biographical study.
 - c)** kinds of biography.
 - d)** sequence of steps in biographical study.

- 7** The outline that you have begun to make of the book of Amos is called a
- a)** reference outline.
 - b)** factual outline.
 - c)** textual outline.

answers to the study questions

- 10 b)** individual's moral and ethical traits.
- 1 b)** Jesus spoke of Abraham as a presently living person.
- 11 a)** Both Paul's speech and Luke's recording of it purposed to show by Paul's life and experience that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment and completion of the religion of the Jews.
- b)** The Jews, "brothers and fathers" (verse 1).
- c)** In Paul's case, all three seem to be factors. He uses facts from his life to illustrate his zeal as a Jew by birth and education. He uses his personal testimony to prove that he knows what he is talking about.
- d)** Yes, Paul's early life as a devout Jew led up to his later experiences.
- e)** Yes, the moral points out that Paul assented to the stoning of Stephen and persecuted Christians out of a mistaken sense of moral responsibility.
- f)** Yes, Paul was hoping his reputation as an educated, trained Jew with ethical standards would help him win his case.
- 2 c)** Hebrews 11 emphasizes faith above all else.
- 12** A possible purpose Amos may have had for including facts about his life in his book is as follows: Perhaps Amos wanted to show his integrity, his trustworthiness as a prophet. By telling something of his former life and how he came to be a prophet, Amos made it known that he had not asked for the job of being a prophet (7:15). The fact that God ordered Amos to prophesy indicated that he was prophesying the truth.
- 3 b)** specific aims the author had in mind.
- 13**
- 1.** Amos was a shepherd.
 - 2.** Amos was from the town of Tekoa.
 - 3.** God revealed things to Amos.
 - 4.** This revelation was about Israel.
 - 5.** An earthquake happened two years after this revelation.

- 6.** Uzziah was king of Judah and Jereboam was king of Israel.
- 4**
- a** 2) Simple narrative
 - b** 4) Narrative exposition
 - c** 1) Character exposition
 - d** 3) Argument
- 14** Suggested questions for more study: 1) Where was Tekoa? 2) When were these men kings? 3) What was the date of this earthquake? Is it mentioned anywhere else?
- 5**
- a** T
 - b** F
 - c** T
 - d** F
 - e** T
- 15 a** The Sovereign Lord speaks to man. (This is not the only correct answer.)
- b** Trembling of earth and sky, and drying up of pastures and grass
- 6 a)** all that has a bearing on his life or influence.
- 16 a** The Lord sings a funeral song over Israel.
- b** Because nearly all of Israel's soldiers are dying in battle.
- 7** Careful reading.
- 17** Amos was given visions from the Lord.
- 8**
- I. Birth and Early Life
 - II. Conversion and Ministry
 - III. Relationships With Others
 - IV. Character Evaluation
 - V. End of Life Experiences and Death
 - VI. Author's Purpose for Writing
- 18** Amos is accused by Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, of conspiracy.
- 20** That he is not a religious professional who does prophesying for a living.

- 19**
1. Amos does not prophesy for pay.
 2. Amos is a herdsman.
 3. Amos takes care of fig trees.
- 9 a)** major periods in the person's life.