Many of us have read the Bible as if it were merely a mosaic of little bits—theological bits, moral bits, historical-critical bits, sermon bits, devotional bits. But when we read the Bible in such a fragmented way, we ignore its divine author’s intention to shape our lives through its story. All human communities live out of some story that provides a context for understanding the meaning of history and gives shape and direction to their lives. If we allow the Bible to become fragmented, it is in danger of being absorbed into whatever other story is shaping our culture, and it will thus cease to shape our lives as it should... If our lives are to be shaped by the story of Scripture, we need to understand two things well: the biblical story is a compelling unity on which we may depend, and each of us has a place within that story. (Goheen, p. 12)

The goal of this study guide is to supplement the teaching on Sunday morning with background information on various sections of the Bible and to help provide a bit of a “map” for your own study of God's Word.

-Study Guide by Geoff Horn, May 2010

**Resources**

**FEE**

**ROBERTS**

**BIBLE**

**GOHEEN**
THE BIBLE IS ONE STORY
The Bible is not just a collection of 66 books. It is not a “how-to” manual or a religious textbook. The Bible is the **Story of Who God is and What He Has Done.**

The Bible is a diverse collection of different writings. It contains 66 books written by about 40 authors over nearly 2,000 years. It has two main sections: Old and New Testament [TESTAMENT is synonymous with COVENANT] written in two main languages, Hebrew and Greek.

ONE AUTHOR
Although the Bible contains a great variety of material (different kinds of writings), written by many human authors over a long period of time, it holds together as a unity. Fundamentally, it is just one book written by one author with one main subject.

Paul wrote that “**all Scripture is God-breathed**” (2 Tim. 3:16); referring to the Old Testament (as the N.T. didn’t exist yet). It is God’s Word. God ensured by his Spirit that everything that was written was what He wanted them to write. Just as Jesus is both fully human and divine, so God’s Word is both a human and a divine book. God is the author.

ONE SUBJECT
The Bible covers a great deal of ground and has many characters and emphases. But there is one supreme subject who binds it all together: Jesus Christ.

This is not just true of the New Testament, it’s true of the O.T. as well. In John 5:39 Jesus said **“these are the Scriptures that testify about me.”** Jesus is the interpretive key to the Bible. He is the reason that so many strange, outdated and seemingly unrelated parts of Scripture make sense. The passages in Luke 24:27, 44 and 2 Timothy 3:15 point to this as well.

**It was God’s plan all along to send his Son Jesus.** The Bible is a story of Redemption. God has planned all along to fulfill His covenant promises.

THE BIBLE IS NOT A BIG BOOK OF QUOTATIONS
The fact that it is one book with one story has huge implications for the way we read it. **The way you read a book depends on what type of book you think it is.** Bible teachers often refer to this as the Genre question. Genre is a term that refers to the type of literature something is.

We do not read a Shakespeare play the same way we read the telephone book nor do we read a novel the same way we read a book of quotations.

The same is true of the Bible. With the exception of some of the Proverbs, the Bible doesn’t contain isolated sayings. We should be wary of dipping into it at random and extracting individual verses without regard to context. We are almost bound to misunderstand the Bible if we read it that way.
To really understand the Bible we have to learn how to interpret it. The most important ingredient is to use your common sense. Beyond that, Biblical interpretation has two parts: First, you must try and understand what was said to them back then and there. The big Bible-scholar word for this is exegesis. Second, you must learn to hear that same Word in the here and now. This is called hermeneutics.

Put another way, interpretation is about answering the question: What does it mean? To answer that question about any passage in Scripture, we have to first look at what it meant and then we move to what it means.

Step 1: Learn what it meant (exegesis)

Step 2: Finding what it means (hermeneutics)

This has also been described as asking: 1) What?, 2) So What? And 3) Now What?

Each verse needs to be understood in the context of the chapter in which it appears, Each chapter in light of the book as a whole, Each book in light of the story of the whole of Scripture.

The Bible is not a collection of books. It is one book.

THE THREAD OF THE STORY: UNIFYING THEME OF THE BIBLE

There is some debate as to whether or not it is possible to point to a unifying theme of that binds the whole Bible together. Some people warn of the danger of squeezing all parts of the Bible into a mould rather than letting them speak individually in their rich variety. That is an important warning that should be heard. Any unifying theme must arise out of Scripture itself, rather than be something we impose upon it; and it must be broad enough to allow the individual parts to make its own contribution.

The theme of the Kingdom of God satisfies both requirements. It was the dominant theme of Jesus’ teaching. In the Old Testament it is clear that God’s covenant is the central theme... these are not contradictory.

God’s covenant promises are kingdom promises. Kings make covenants. The covenant promises God makes in the Old Testament form the foundation of the relationship between God and His people.

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1 Fee, p. 18
2 Fee, p. 23.
The Bible narrates the story of God’s journey on that long road to redemption. Every part of the Bible—each event, book, character, command, prophecy, and poem—must be understood in the context of the one story line.

**Mission of the Biblical Story**
- Israel → Be a light to the nations
- Jesus → The light of the world
- Church → Continue the mission... be salt and light to the world. Testify of the Jesus.

**WE EACH HAVE A PLACE WITHIN THE STORY**

The only proper answer to someone saying “Tell me about yourself...” is to tell a story or a bunch of stories. By sharing these stories we come to know each other. For us to know someone, we don’t just learn things/facts about them: i.e.- age, height, weight, job, etc... For us to really know someone we have to know who they are; the experiences, ideas and people who have shaped their lives. Right?

Their personal stories give the context and explain much about their lives. Yet, to make sense of our lives, we have to look to other stories, bigger stories to help us find meaning for our lives. Is there a true story bigger than both of us? Are our personal stories—apart or together—parts of a more comprehensive story?

Humans use stories... we have always used them as the best way to talk about the way the world actually is. One of the questions we need to ask ourselves is, **what is the real story of which my life is part?**

Which story a person lives out of makes a huge difference in how one interprets events in life. Take the example of divorce. Even where divorce may be necessary and the right thing for a person to do, Christians will always see divorce as coming far short of the ideal that God intends for a man and a woman united in marriage. Hence, it is a tragedy.

But this point of view differs sharply from the view held by many in our culture. Due to the consumerism and individualism of the Western cultural story, divorce is often portrayed as something rather positive: no tragedy, but rather a courageous step of personal growth. The roots of this disagreement go to the foundation of the respective stories that have given the differing views their shape and substance.

**Biblical Christianity claims that the Bible alone tells the true story of our world.**

It is one thing to confess the Bible to be the Word of God, but often quite another thing to know how read the Bible in a way that lets it influence the whole of our lives. Such a story invites us—compels us—to get involved.

> When you read God’s Word, you must constantly be saying to yourself, “It is talking to me, and about me.”
> *-Soren Kierkegaard*

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3 Goheen, p. 19
BOOKS OF HISTORY

The historical books of the Bible are often referred to as narrative history or simply as narrative. They are quite simply—stories. There are traditionally 12 books that are usually classified as “historical books” in the Old Testament. These are:

- Joshua—Judges—Ruth—1st and 2nd Samuel—1st and 2nd Kings—
  1st and 2nd Chronicles—Ezra—Nehemiah—Esther

However, there are several other additional books of the Bible that are rightly understood to be written as historical narratives. They are:

- Genesis—Exodus*—Numbers*—Acts

We are including them into our study of history books because that is the type of writings that they are. *Exodus and Numbers are also part of the category Law.

Historical Books - 16 books total

1. **Genesis** – Starts with Creation and the Flood and then tells the story of the People of God, the Israelites, and how God made a promise/covenant with Abraham and his descendants to be their God. Tells how the Israelites found themselves in Egypt.

2. **Exodus** – Tells of God using Moses to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and their journey through the wilderness to the Promised Land. God gives them the Law and dwells with them in the Tabernacle.

3. **Numbers** – Tells of the 40 years in the desert/wilderness wandering. It tells of the murmuring and rebellion of God’s people and their subsequent judgment.

4. **Joshua** – The first half of Joshua describes the 7-year conquest of the Land of Promise. The last half deals with partitioning the lands to the people.

5. **Judges** - Time of Judges. This was a rough time period. The Israelites did not drive out all the inhabitants of Canaan and began to take part in their idolatry. 7 cycles of foreign oppression, repentance, and deliverance. In the end, the people failed to learn their lesson.


The next 6 books trace the time from Samuel (the last of the Judges) to the Captivity

7. **First Samuel** - Samuel carries Israel from judges to King Saul
8. **Second Samuel** - David as King, his adultery, and God’s covenant with him.
9. **First Kings** – Under King Solomon, Israel is powerful. Solomon dies, then division of tribes: 10 to the north and 2 to the south.
10. **Second Kings** - The Divided Kingdom. All 19 kings of Israel were bad; therefore, captivity in Assyria (722 B.C.). In Judah, 8 of 20 rulers were good but went into exile too.
11. **First Chronicles** - A recounting of the history of Israel to the time of Solomon.
12. **Second Chronicles** - Continued recounting of the life of Solomon, building of temple, to the captivity. History of Judah only.

The Next 3 books deal with Israel’s Restoration.
13. **Ezra** - Cyrus let most of the Jews return to their land of Israel. Zerubbabel led the people (539 B.C.). Ezra returned later with more Jews (458 B.C.) Built the temple.

14. **Nehemiah** - Building the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah got permission from the king of Persia to rebuild the walls (444 B.C.) after the exile. Revival in the land.

15. **Esther** - Took place during chapters 6 and 7 of Ezra. Mordecai. Plot to kill the Jewish people. A young Jewish woman is used by God to preserve her people.

**The last book of History tells the story of the spread of the Gospel into the World.**


Here is a short, “cliff-notes” overview of the Historical Books.

**GENESIS:** It’s name means “beginnings.”
God creates the world and everything in it. He makes humans in his image and has a relationship with them. They have the responsibility to “take care” of the world. The world is God’s kingdom... Genesis 3 and rebellion. Cain and Abel, Noah and the Flood. (first covenant)
The tower of Babel represents the perennial human desire to build our own kingdom apart from God. Along comes Abraham (around 2000 BC)... from Ur... God wants him to be the Father of His people... Abraham has a Son (Isaac), Isaac has several sons: the important one is Jacob. His nickname is Israel. Israel has 12 sons (famous one Joseph)... this whole group of people go to Egypt and spend 400 years as a slave people.

**EXODUS:** The name means “departure”... God chooses Moses and talks to him... God relates to Moses his personal name “I Am”... sends him to Pharaoh to let my people go (free free yeah yeah yeah) and God sends plagues on Egypt to show that he is powerful... 10 plagues and then the final one of the Passover... Israelites and Moses pack their bags... Red Sea... God promises them to take them to the land flowing with milk and honey (Promised Land)... He provides for them manna to eat... they complain... giving of God’s Laws at Mt. Sinai... 40 years of wandering and sinning.

**NUMBERS:** The title of the book refers to a “numbering of people” but the Hebrew name for the book bemidbar means “in the desert.” It begins and ends with a census/list of people. The middle of it is filled with specific rules and instances from the 40 years in the desert... 12 spies sent (the land God had promised has people living in it... 10 spies come back w/tail between their legs, two spies come back saying we can do it, God’s on our side.) It tells the story of Israel’s journey from Mt Sinai to Moab on the border of Canaan. There’s a repeated pattern of complaining and rebellion.

**JOSHUA:** (his name means “God saves” or “God is salvation”)
God brings them into the land- 1st twelve chapters and Joshua and the Israelites dominate on the inhabitants of the land. God gives the Israelites victory.
At the end Joshua says “Don’t forget what God has done...” Follow the book of the law of Moses.
JUDGES: (1390-1055 bc) Not Judge Judy...military leaders and prophets, wars and battles—taking the land for God. Main point: Without God as their King, things are in chaos.

1 & 2 SAMUEL: (1075-975 bc) Samuel: Prophet, Priest and Judge who appointed Israel’s first king. The problem is that Israel wanted a king instead of God rather than a king under God. Both of these were written as one book originally, but in their translation were put into two sections...it's basically a biography of David's life.

1 & 2 KINGS: (975-586 bc) Starts out with Solomon and Israel’s “golden age.” They are God's People in God’s Place and under God’s Blessing and Rule. But then disobedience comes back... Good kings and bad kings...idol worship...Kingdom split into two (Israel in the North and 10 tribes in Samaria, Judah in the South in Jerusalem) God says, “I’ll show you who's in charge...”

1 & 2 CHRONICLES: (1010-586 bc) Genealogies and looking back saying, “is God still interested in us? Is His covenant still in effect?” Chronicler borrows from other books of history (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings...) It is a selective history of Judah primarily.

EZRA and NEHEMIAH: (538-433 bc) Post-Babylonian exile and the return and rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple (Zerubabbel brought a group, then Ezra brought a group, then Nehemiah brought a group) This basically runs us through the end of OT history...for 400 years there is a “silent period”...dispersion of Jews throughout the Greek, then Roman world. Main Point: God’s people return to him, both to the land and to worshiping Him.

RUTH: Central story to the line of Jesus Christ coming through David...happens during the time of the Judges.

ESTHER: Esther’s story happens in Persia during the Babylonian exile and she saves the Jewish people. God uses these two women (Ruth and Esther) to save and preserve God’s people.

Challenge: Are you going to stand up and say “enough is enough?” Are you going to put God on the throne? (or a gold cow, or a high paying job or whatever) Get rid of your IDOLS! We have way more idols than the Israelites have. We put more things in the place of God...

Where do you spend your money? Where do you spend your time? What do you put on the throne? God says “I want all of you.” Not just a piece.

ZOOM IN
If you have time, read the story of Josiah in 2 Kings 22-23. Take some time to imagine yourself in the story. Isn’t it amazing that they could have lost the Book of the Law? They had forgotten who they were. They didn’t know the stories anymore. They were lost. Aimless.

Have you ever felt this way? How do we avoid doing the same thing in regards to knowing and living out the Bible?
HOMEGROUP QUESTIONS for Week 1

What about you?

• What were some of your favorite stories when you were growing up?
• In the story of your life, what would your current chapter be titled?
• What type of literature do you most often read (fiction, biography, mystery, newspaper, blog, poetry, tabloid, etc.)?

What it Meant

• In order to understand what a particular Bible passage meant when it was written, we have to look at the context and background of the story. Review the keys for reading historical books of the Bible mentioned in Sunday's message. Which ones are helpful in understanding the context and background of Ruth Chapter 4?
• Imagine yourself in the story in Ruth 4. You are a friend of Naomi’s and you’ve been praying for a long time that God would fill Naomi’s emptiness. What does it mean (emotionally and practically) that Boaz has become her kinsman-redeemer?
• What is a kinsman-redeemer? (tip: check out Leviticus 25:25 and Ruth 2:20. If you have a study Bible or commentary see if there are any notes about it, or you can always go online and Google “kinsman redeemer” and see what comes up.)

What it Means

• Matthew 1:5 (part of the genealogy of Jesus) tells us that Ruth and Boaz’s son, Obed, was part of the line of King David from which Jesus descends. In what way does Jesus become a kinsman-redeemer for us?
• Naomi learned what all of us must learn to some degree: life and family is filled with disappointment. But just as God brought Naomi from emptiness to fullness through the selfless love of Ruth and Boaz, so the Lord brought Israel from unrest to rest through their descendant David, who selflessly gave himself to fight Israel’s battles on the Lord’s behalf, and ultimately through Jesus Christ. In what ways (emotionally and practically) have you experienced Jesus bringing you from emptiness to fullness and unrest to rest?
• Share prayer requests.