

I. Intro. [blank PPT]

A. 2 weeks ago we had what is often 1 of the most moving worship services of the whole year:

1. A service centered around believers in JC choosing to publicly commit their lives to Christ in baptism [baptism group PPT]

a) And many would agree that the most powerful time in the service is not when someone is dunked or has water poured on them

b) It's when they tell a small portion of their own faith stories

2. These stories make us laugh & cry & warm our hearts, because we feel evidence of the living God powerfully @ work in these people's lives

B. There's another time in the typical church year that I also consider a highlight, but it doesn't happen on Sunday morning in the sanctuary [blank PPT]

1. In a congregation w/ numerous youth group members attending Bethany Christian Schools, we usually have a few seniors taking the mandatory Bible class there with Dale Shenk.

a) The final exam for that class is an extended oral faith statement of about 20 minutes by each student

b) Some of Waterford's BCS seniors have chosen to present theirs on a Wed. night here @ church, often with their friends, family present

2. In the past 9 years or so of hearing these authentic faith statements, I have heard several students naming the sources of ultimate authority in their lives.

a) Most of them name the Bible in some way. For a few the Bible is clearly the most important authority in their lives

b) But I've noticed that for some, their faith in God or respect for Jesus does not draw heavily on the Bible

c) For some, the Bible matters, but it's just one among several authorities in their lives: personal experience, logic; friends or family.

d) I'm also struck by how many youth in churches today, no matter what school or denomination they attend, seldom actually read from the Bible and are not familiar with most of the content in it.

C. Frankly, the youth are not alone

1. Perhaps we as adults in the church have taught them well to give little more than lip service to the importance of the Bible ...

2. How often do we as parents and role models actually read from the Bible outside of church services?
3. How often do we make any authoritative reference to it?

II. In today's Western world, **the Bible is considered largely irrelevant**, even by many professing Christians

A. **Biblical illiteracy is a growing issue among all ages, not just with youth**

1. After all, how can a book composed by many different authors written over a period of a thousand years in a distant culture be relevant in our culture today?
2. What we don't know is functionally not relevant to us
 - a) In casual conversation we may say the Bible is still relevant today, but if some of us were honest we'd admit to desperately wishing this thick incomprehensible volume from 2K years WERE relevant
 - b) But the relevance of the Bible is not in what we say we believe re. it ... in the end, we're serious about its relevance only IF we read it, study it, pray it and live it.

B. **If you recognize those last words I just said, then welcome again to YOTB**, because that's what we hope this special year will help you do: [YOTB graphic PPT] **read it, study it, pray it, live it.**

1. Loanne introduced you to several aspects of YOTB, incl. the resource binder you received for your household
2. As we enter YOTB, we're not just aiming to give you a greater familiarity with this big collection of ancient religious literature

III. **In fact, we're not approaching the Bible primarily as a literary collection at all**

A. **Across the breadth of Xian churches, various traditions have viewed the Bible in different ways:** [Bible views 1 PPT]

1. A literary collection containing a variety of different disconnected books
2. A book of laws, propositions, ideas & theology [Bible views 2 PPT]
3. A single book of scattered, disconnected stories [Bible views 3 PPT] (by which we somehow get an idea of God & what God wants)
4. (more common) A book of a God-scripted "puppet show" of God solving the sin problem [Bible views 4 PPT]

- a) Often described in terms of an unchangeable “plan of salvation” where God had it all preordained
- b) When you look at the Bible this way, all the human actors are like puppets in a divine script, where human decisions are actually initiated by God, even if the people don’t know it
- c) This can make the Old Testament almost meaningless, except for giving a promise of the future solution, & then biding time until Jesus arrives

5. [Bible views 5 PPT] A dynamic story of God’s interaction with a chosen people through whom God would be revealed to the whole world, for the purpose of reconciliation

- a) This is the view we will be taking in YOTB

B. So if we view the Bible as a grand, dynamic narrative, then it’s not so surprising that our kickoff Sunday theme is “Living into God’s story”

1. YOTB is not really about a collection of sacred books... **It’s about this grandest story of all, God’s salvation story**

2. Here is where we’re deeply indebted to Professors Marion Bontrager and Michele Hershberger of Hesston College ...

- a) Together they have taught the BibLit course to thousands of Hesston students who have discovered for themselves the grand narrative of salvation history given to us in the Bible.
- b) Their approach has been so valuable that congregations started coming to them to use this material.
- c) So I acknowledge that most of the content you hear preached and taught this year is not original to us pastors but adapted with permission from Marion Bontrager, who just retired this year from Hesston College, after teaching the BibLit class for over 25 years

3. If you ask any Hesston College alumni who’ve taken the course, one of its legacies is a big long word that makes other people scratch their heads or roll their eyes –

IV. Heilsgeschichte

A. Let me explain that a little, since some of you are probably wondering why we’re featuring a German word that’s 15 letters long

1. Yesterday I drove past our mother church, Yellow Creek Mennonite, out in the country. They are also embarking on a Year of the Bible at the same time as us.

a) On their exterior sign, I think they usually post sermon titles. Yesterday their sign said, "Heilsgeschichte what?"

2. For simplicity, we've used a rough translation ("salvation history") but that isn't really adequate, either.

3. If the Bible is the big story of God's salvation history, the question is, "What do we mean by this word 'history'?"

a) Some of us tend to think about history as just a set of facts, a linear account of events happening in a sequence ... very cut & dried

There's a German word for that understanding, almost the same as the English: *historie*, which is basically just recounting the facts

But you'll notice we're not using that word here

b) Instead, there's another German word, *geschichte*, which goes beyond *historie*: *Geschichte* is basically facts + interpretation

Geschichte does not claim to be neutral & objective. It is interpreted history, with a message it intends to tell.

c) You can think of the difference between these words like this
[historie/geschichte PPT]

Historie: My car spun on the ice, hit a tree, & I walked away unharmed.

Geschichte: My car spun on the ice, hit a tree, & God saved my life.

4. So to be more accurate, *heilsgeschichte* = holy interpreted history [heilsgeschichte PPT], which is more of a mouthful than the German word

B. Why does this big word matter?

1. It informs what we expect to find when we come to the Bible

a) We don't come to the Bible expecting it to be a scientifically provable history book. The Bible is a salvation book, not a science book.

b) 2 Tim. 3:15 in the NIV says Scripture makes us "wise for salvation", but the Bible doesn't claim to make us "wise for science".

c) The Bible was not written to answer questions that would not even be framed in modern scientific terms for another 1800 years!

2. Although we don't expect to find a science book or an exact history book, we do expect writings that will point us to God and give us guidance for living, once we take into account the differences between our worldview and the biblical worldview (something I [will] address[ed] in nurture hour)

3. Seeing the Bible as *heilsgeschichte* and not merely *historie*, is spoken most clearly in the words of John 20:31 [Bible purpose PPT] -- these [things] are written so that you may come to believe^[a] that Jesus is the Messiah,^[b] the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name

- a) The Bible was given to us not merely to teach us about God, or to provide facts about the Jews and the early church.
- b) It was given to point us toward a living and committed faith in God, as eventually revealed to us in Jesus

V. As we focus more this year on the *heilsgeschichte* that is revealed in the Bible, I acknowledge up front that some people bring more than a little skepticism and questioning to the Bible [blank PPT]

A. Last week Velma through Lyle named that there are many stories in the Bible, especially the Old Testament, that make us uncomfortable or even angry

1. To our eyes, they don't make sense, or they're grossly unjust, or they seem to show a God we don't believe in.
2. We probably won't answer all your questions of that type, but we hope that this year's emphasis will help you find ways to understand and interpret those difficult parts within a larger salvation narrative, rather than just ignoring or discarding them
3. Sometimes the distance between our world today and the Middle Eastern world of 3000 years ago seems so great that we just give up trying to understand it.

B. Two things help us bridge that distance, things which I (will) talk(ed) about more specifically in nurture hour:

1. The first is the importance of worldviews, both in recognizing how people in biblical times understood reality and in us recognizing the strengths and limits of our own worldviews
2. The second thing that helps us connect to the Bible across thousands of miles and thousands of years is a bridge of sorts: the hermeneutical bridge, referred to in the drama & which we also (will) address(ed) more in nurture hour
 - a) In inductive Bible study, we start by first setting aside our current worldview assumptions and cross the imaginary hermeneutical bridge at the beginning
 - b) So we begin observing and analyzing and interpreting a Bible passage from the perspective of its own time and culture, trying to get inside what it meant in its own place & time

- c) And only after doing those things within the biblical worldview do we cross back over the hermeneutical bridge to our own worldview, so that we can apply the Scripture for our day and time.

VI. All of this has been a lengthy introduction to YOTB and how we intend to approach this book we call the Bible

A. With the BibLit course, one of the benefits they've given students of the Bible is to provide them with a few tools to help them organize and make sense of all these seemingly disconnected stories ... **I will name 2 of these tools**

1. First is the *Heilsgeschichte* timeline which Marion Bontrager developed as a visual aid or shortcut

- a) You have it not only up here on a banner, but in 3 other places for your reference:

In a bookmark in the binder you received today

In the large foldout in the binder, AND

In the pocket in the back of your blue hymnals

- b) The timeline is basically linear, covering from the creation through the early church ... yet it is not simply a straight line

Sometimes the line goes up or down to show highlights or low points in the story of God's people

Along the way there are 10 or so asterisks that show some of the crises or turning points in the story of God's people

- c) And the timeline shows more than one parallel line going on, reflecting both God's ultimate will and God's remedial will due to the people's disobedience. (more about those concepts in a few weeks)

2. A 2nd tool is a set of 3 basic orientation questions that can be helpful to ask when reading any part of the Bible

- a) When trying to make sense of a Bible passage within the bigger salvation history, we can sometimes get perspective by asking 3 questions of it: [3 questions PPT]

What is the sin problem?

What is God doing to solve the sin problem?

How faithfully are God's people cooperating?

- b) From time to time, you will hear us coming back to these 3 questions

B. These 3 questions can also help you make sense of the colored bars that run along the top edge of the timeline. (*invite to pull it out from binder or hymnal if can't see banner*)

1. Roughly speaking, the sin problem is defined in the creation & fall stories that give us pictures of sin & its effects ...
2. the solution to the sin problem is promised in God's covenant with Abraham to make his descendants into a people that are blessed and that bless the whole world
3. The solution is begun when a true covenant people of God is formed out of the Exodus of a ragtag assembly of Hebrew slaves from Egypt, but the people are often unfaithful to their covenant
4. The attempted solution continues when God's people do not trust God to lead them and fight for them but insist on taking up weapons and having a king like other nations, which is not what God wanted for them. Still, God let them have what they asked for, including the consequences it would bring in violence and turning away from God
5. The solution for the sin problem, according to God's original vision, is finally accomplished in the birth, life, death and resurrection of God's Son Jesus Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit
6. And with the creation of the church by the power of the Holy Spirit, the solution continues to be realized even to this day through this new chosen covenant people

C. And that brings us back to today! [blank PPT]

1. As we enter this exciting experience called YOTB, I invite you to fully live into God's story so that you understand it and feel it, to the point that it also feels like your story and not just some strange set of unrelated stories from 2K years ago.
2. Please join now in singing a song that tells in very condensed fashion this same *Heilsgeschichte* thru the metaphor of God giving us a song. (#25 in STJ)
3. As it says in v. 5: *so let us all sing with one heart and one voice the song of the Singer in whom we rejoice!*