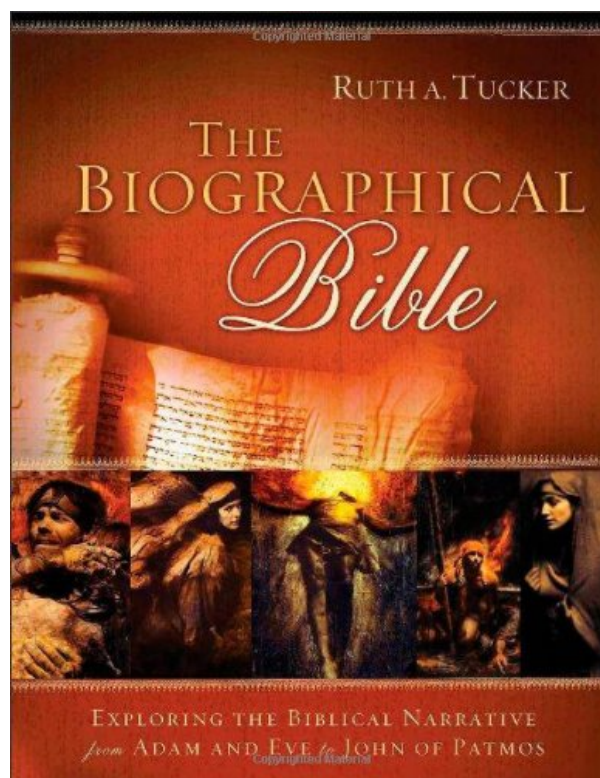
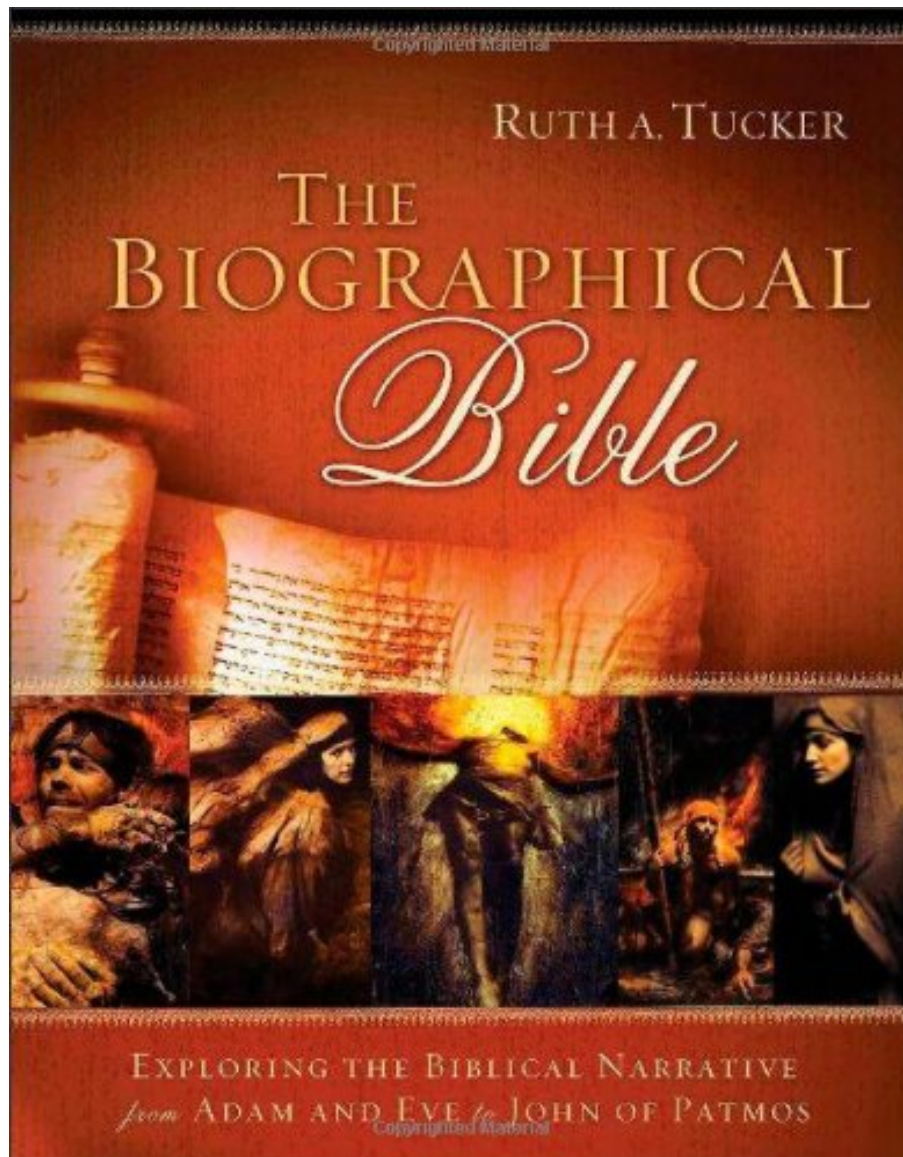


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Illuminating the Bible, one intriguing life at a time

Alive, authentic, and utterly unpredictable, the people and personalities of the Bible are not the two-dimensional figures of Sunday school flannel boards but the living, breathing, animated human beings who participated in God's grand story. They loved, worked, and worshiped. They married, mourned, and manipulated. They murdered, betrayed, and begged God for forgiveness. In short--they are us.

The *Biographical Bible* offers you an engaging overview of Scripture through the lens of the fascinating people who populate its pages. Through insightful reflections on the lives of over eighty individuals, this unique book captures the essence of these colorful characters, warts and all. The perfect companion to personal or group Bible study, and also endlessly entertaining, this lively narrative brings the Bible to life as no other book does.

Come along on this chronological tour. Far from being ancient and irrelevant, these stories are timely, provocative, and most of all, illuminating.

Ruth A. Tucker (PhD, Northern Illinois University) has for more than three decades taught at colleges and seminaries, including Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and Calvin Theological Seminary. She is the author of many books, including *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya*, *Walking Away from Faith*, and *Parade of Faith: A Biographical History of the Christian Church*. Tucker lives with her husband, John Worst, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Find out more at [www.ruthtucker.com](http://www.ruthtucker.com).

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### The Rest of the Story?

By ruthjoec

I've mentioned at different times that one thing I like about Biblical fiction is that it fleshes out and brings to life characters about whom we really know little. This book looks at the world as it was in Biblical times and tries to tell "the rest of the story". As with any book like this, there is quite a bit of supposition.

I didn't read the whole book. I don't know if my copy from NetGalley was similar to the copy I would get if I purchased a Kindle edition, but if it was, I don't recommend the Kindle edition. You can "look inside" on Amazon and see that the book is filled with pictures and with sidebars or text inserts quoting various scripture scholars over the years. While the varying colors and typefaces may work on the paper edition or perhaps on a color tablet, on my black and white Kindle, it just made the text seem redundant.

A couple of the characters about whom I read stuck in my mind. Abraham sacrificing Issac was mentioned. After wondering why God would ask such a thing of Abraham, it was suggested that perhaps Abraham loved Issac too much--that in some ways he had made a god of Issac. His willingness to sacrifice Isaac proved that the Lord was God, not Issac. The book also mentioned that we never saw Abraham speaking to Isaac after that. Regarding how easily Isaac was fooled by Jacob, the author postulated that perhaps Isaac had Downs Syndrome, which would explain his lack of fertility and the fact that he did not fight back when Abraham tried to sacrifice him.

The book is definitely written from a Protestant perspective. It talks about all the sons of Mary.

I'd like to thank the publisher for making a review copy available via NetGalley. Grade: B-

19 of 21 people found the following review helpful.

### Narrating the Stories of People in the Bible

By Dr Conrade Yap

The Bible is not a theological treatise or a spiritual dissertation about God. It is also not a how-to manual to get rich, to be healthy, or to be used like a "Life Book for Dummies" edition. Many publishers, preachers, and well meaning people have unfortunately used the Bible as a "manual for propositions." That is not just being irreverent about the Word, it is also misusing the very nature of the Bible. For the Bible is more than mere logical series of formulas and methodologies for life to fit the twenty-first century minds, it is about how God reveals himself to people through people. That is why when one seeks to understand the Bible, one needs to understand the characters and the people in the Bible, not in scientific or management mindsets, but biographical. Rather than to read each passage of the Bible with critique in mind, or to analyze the pericopes with a solution-seeking mindset, read it with an openness on how God has touched lives in the past, and how God reveals creation to us, as intended by God.

Written in three parts, Tucker presents many biblical characters as closely as how the Bible presents them. Calling these stories as "biblical narrative from Adam and Eve to John of Patmos," the stories are presented

from Genesis to Revelation as follows:

### Part 1 - From Paradise to the Land of Promise

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Tucker begins with the Garden of Eden, about how God had originally intended to be "personally proactive with humankind." Unfortunately, sin got the better of Adam and Eve, which leads to a paradise lost for humankind. Adam and Eve's sinfulness runs into the next generation where Cain murdered Abel. Tucker does not mince the story at all, choosing to tell the stories of the "boys" as they are; from Noah's heroic ark to some silly personal behaviour; Abraham as the father of the three major religious faiths in the world; Isaac's clumsy choices and preferential treatments; Jacob and Esau's family disputes over birthrights and blessings; plus the stories of famous Patriarchs and leaders such as Joseph, Moses, and many others. The section concludes with the book of Judges, often seen as a stunning deterioration of humankind and their wanton evil on one another. The land of promise somehow seems to be turning into a land of compromise and disaster.

### Part 2 - Kings and Prophets Guide God's People

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Beginning with the journey metaphors of Naomi, Ruth, and Hannah, Tucker tries to see the geographical story with spiritual perspective. From a time of Judges where women appear to be dispensable, the biblical authors present special mothers that God use to bring forth his divine providence. This particular chapter is written with acute feminine sensitivity, with perceptive details about Ruth's sense of faith in the midst of personal insecurity, and Hannah's dedication of her baby in the midst of anguish. It shows us that God can use not just the great Patriarchs of old, but also ordinary women. It is a story of God whose plans are eloquently implemented through simple faith. Unfortunately, the people's constant cry for a king attempts to derail Israel's faith in God, especially through a disastrous first king of Israel: King Saul. With David, mankind has a shining example of a man after God's heart. After David, Solomon's downfall leads the way as we see one king after another, turns the nation of Israel from bad to worse; from national solidarity to various captivity. The few good kings in the mix are few when compared to the rest of the lot. Then there are the prophets who continue to pronounce and prophesy in the hope that the nation will turn back to God, and to forsake their sinful ways. Interestingly, we read too of how even prophets can disobey, at least for a while, such as Jonah. All the major and minor prophets are covered. Tucker calls the "neglect of the Minor Prophets as unfortunate" as their message remains timeless.

### Part 3 - A Messiah and His Mission

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The biographical descriptions continues through saints such as Mary, the humility of Joseph, and the boldness of John the Baptist. She describes Jesus's time on earth, how he was born, the place he grew up in, the temptations, and the journey to the cross. She concludes just like John the Disciple who says that there are far too many things Jesus had done or taught that are not described or recorded down at all. The biographies also cover Mary Magalene, the people at Bethany, as well as the other disciples of Christ. Tucker calls them the "disciples on the fringe." At the heart of her observations is that these men are very ordinary people. Regardless of their careers and their clumsiness, something divine is happening through them. God uses Peter, the "fisherman with a foot in his mouth" to be a prominent leader of the Early Church. God turns Paul from persecutor to preacher. She continues with the descriptions of Paul's co-workers, and ends with John of Patmos, the one who wrote Revelations.

### So What?

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It may not be immediately clear at first who the author is aiming this book at. At the introduction, it looks like Tucker making a stand for the Bible's timeless truths and messages that have not changed. She makes a



strong case for reading the Bible as a narrative rather than a philosophical or an instrument for spiritual formulations of ideas and methodologies. Having said that, there are many interesting observations throughout the book that can make a case for spiritual learning or formulating a teaching idea. The many flashbacks and contemporary applications throughout the book help to bridge the Bible's ancient contexts with modern minds. I like particularly the many quotations and passages drawn from the Church fathers, the Reformers, as well as contemporary theologians.

Tucker also maintains the integrity of the Bible as trustworthy, and at various parts of the book, makes a few observations that the Bible is no mere fairy tale. It is collection of stories that form a big overall narrative of God's revelation to mankind. It is a story with a message, using people willing to carry the message, culminating in Christ becoming the message, and the rise of the Church that proclaims the message.

My criticism of this book is that the Bible while it has many narratives, has other genres not adequately captured in this book. For instance, what about the wisdom books? Surely, one cannot compress the wisdom books altogether into the narrative genre. What about the prophecies? Thus, to call the book a "biographical bible" is a bit of a stretch. Simply put, the Bible is not a mere book of narratives, so to call it as such will not be appropriate, literally speaking. That said, the strengths of this book lay in the very creative storytelling ability of Tucker. It reminds me of Walter Wangerin's "The Book of God" and "The Story." At least from a gender perspective, this book is a female theologian's contribution toward reading the Bible mainly as a narrative.

If reading this book can help us be better storytellers, that we be able to better express the stories in the Bible the way the Bible had intended to be, then readers would have reaped huge benefits from this book.

Rating: 4.75 stars of 5.

conrade

This book is provided to me courtesy of Baker Books and NetGalley in exchange for an honest review. All opinions offered above are mine unless otherwise stated or implied.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Not a Bible - But a Good Reference Book

By Upstate New York Reader

The Biographical Bible is not a Bible - it is not a Study Bible or a Devotional Bible. Rather it is biographical dictionary of the major individuals found in the Christian Scriptures. Based on solid scholarship, it also has a devotional flavor.

Each chapter is devoted to a period of history - most covering the lives of two or more Biblical characters. For example the first three chapters cover the following characters:

Chapter 1 - Adam, Eve, and the Boys: From Eden to the Tower of Babel

Chapter 2 - Abraham and Sarah: Joys and Tribulations of Old Age

Chapter 3 - Isaac and Rebekah: Marital Missteps and Misery

With 24 chapters, I am estimating that 75 to 100 people are discussed with varying amount of detail.

Within those 24 chapters, the author brings to life people and events that make up Biblical history in very readable series of vignettes that allow the reader to appreciate the contribution that each has made to the Spiritual history of Israel and the Church.

My major complaint with the book is the separation of Biblical footnotes from other references (i.e. other primary and secondary sources). Biblical footnotes are collected in an index at the rear of the text, other references are footnoted in place. Each chapter also includes a list of suggested works for "Further Reading".

The book is a welcome reference book to the library of a pastor or teacher doing a biographical study - whether of a single individual or of a series of characters. It stands along similar works by such authors as Alexander Whyte, James Hastings, Charles Spurgeon, and John MacArthur. It is my hope that this book gains a wide audience and appreciation within the church.

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This review is based on a free electronic copy provided by the publisher for the purpose of creating this review. The opinions expressed are mine alone.

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