



BIBLE IN A YEAR 2020

1 CHRONICLES



**WHAT GOD BUILT
(FOR OUR SAKE)**

Thursday October 29: 1 Chronicles 1-4

God made you a people person. Today Bern Leckie writes:

What did I like about today's reading?

Chronicles is more interesting than it appears. FAR more interesting, based on first appearances, I know. What have we started reading here? The Hebrew phone book? Crib notes for the world's dullest but most spiritual pub quiz? This is a very easy book to skim over (and you probably should skate through the first bits at least), but if we overlook it, we are going to miss something huge.

This is a retelling of the whole Jewish history from a particular perspective. God's people had been exiled, their way of life practically obliterated. Can you imagine not being able to meet for worship every week? I know you can. But this was on the biggest scale, with God's people formed around precious symbols of God's presence, then scattered, their physical recognition of God destroyed and, for the people telling this story, this was generations ago.

But this was changing. The chance was emerging to regroup and rebuild. Could they "build back better?" That would depend. First, they had to remember who they were, who God had made them to be, not just their history but their vision and destiny.

This is what we have started today. I love how the author goes for "big picture" from the first word, "Adam." Why not start at the very beginning? A very good place to start! As I listened to the family roll calls, a big picture formed in my mind of each name connected to others like tiny but important details on a leaf, which was part of branch, then part of a tree.

Bits of this tree were recognisable. I know some clusters of names as branches, I've heard stories of how some parts grew into unmistakable shapes. David grabs my attention, with a royal line of famous and infamous names following. Stories of his praise for God resonate with me. We'll hear more of them soon! Which names and branches stand out to you?

I think God has prompted me not to look at this as an historical register but a picture of his provision. In fact, I think this is the point of this book. It's a reminder to anyone breathing and searching for purpose from God today that everything we are and have is from God. I love how this account of provision doesn't start with materials but with people. And this is not a random, disconnected crowd of people. This is a connected body, a family. You might not know where you fit in the line exactly, but you do – biologically from Adam, emotionally from the stories you remember and relate to, and spiritually from our adoption into this family through Christ. Take it from God: you are a very well-connected people person.

What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

God provides for his people, primarily through people. He provides this reminder of the richness of his blessings and a reassurance that we are far more connected than we feel.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

Thank God for his provision of people around me, and in my past, who made me who I am.

Who am I going to share this with?

My family – we have an extraordinary history as well as incredible God-given potential.

Friday October 30: 1 Chronicles 5-7

God put talented people on the map

Today Bern Leckie writes:

What did I like about today's reading?

It reminds me of one of my favourite books as a child, our A-Z atlas of Birmingham! I loved looking at our street and its connections from the unique angle of the map maker. I was intrigued with how each local area around us had famous names (often pubs) which were landmarks and signifiers of life, placeholders for meetings and memories. And I was fascinated by the shapes of areas built in different ways at different times. Each held clues about when and why it was built, some streets for living, some for travel, others for fun.

In Chronicles, I love this big picture of God's provision which starts with his people, but it's not just a family tree. This section starts to map the connections between famous names, tribes and land. So, when I look over the list, I'm reminded of the land, waters, pastures, settlements with funny names and everything God must have provided through the earth and sky for life to thrive in the abundance I can feel from so... many... names...

I'm also noticing a special kind of family running through chapter 6. Can you see the different shape? Does that suggest it's something special? This unusual tribe of Levi is noted meticulously across dozens of generations. This lot seems important. But, unlike the surrounding tribes, there are no head counts of soldiers or stories of hard-fought territory or plunder. Instead, there's a big chunk of text about... music?!

This is a standout feature at the heart of the map of God's provision - talent to lead worship, before there was even a temple! I'm struck by how painstakingly the writer draws the family line of each worship leader back to Levi, as if to emphasise the importance of their place in the network of people. Everyone is well connected, but these people, close to the physical presence of God, are specially connected to the people God had given a special promise.

Levi's family did not deal in the same kind of physical inheritance as the other tribes because God promised himself as their inheritance. They were to rely on him, and in practice that meant learning to be the experts in connecting people with God. Some grew to be musicians, others priests, and the rest given duties to ensure God's house remained special.

Can you see a shape in God's provision now? It seems designed to point people to him.

What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

God wants to be recognisably present among people. There is a range of families with different stories of what God's provision of material, talents or help in battle has meant for them. Together, God's people map out relational and physical structures which point the world to his provision, presence and power.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

Thank God for what I have learned from my family and what he can help me pass to mine.

Who am I going to share this with?

My family!

Monday November 2: 1 Chronicles 8-10

God gives life faithfully, even when our unfaithfulness brings death

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

What did I like about today's reading?

Today's passage is a bit of a strange sandwich. There are more family lines listed, some twice, as well as a slither and a big chunk of story. What's going on?

The idea standing out to me is God's faithfulness contrasted with human unfaithfulness. On the human side, we're focusing on Saul, Israel's first king, as demanded by God's people when they rejected God's direct rule and wanted to be like other nations – see 1 Samuel 8 for that story. Saul was chosen apparently because he embodied the strength people desired for fighting battles, and he could have decided to be the whole blessed package by following God faithfully.

But Saul chose unfaithfulness and died for it. That's the message of chapter 10 here, and it's clearly a tragedy, not just for him but his family and the whole country. This didn't just affect a few people at one time, but it echoed through Israel's whole history. It looks like a symptom of the much wider unfaithfulness God knew would make his people drift out of reliance on him and into the trouble which ultimately led to their defeat and exile. That is made explicit in the little slither of story, 1 Chronicles 9 verse 1.

However, what I love in the rest of this passage – yes, the lists of names we all skimmed through – is that we get two chances to see the bigger picture from God's point of view. Can you find Saul in each list, once in chapter 8 and once in chapter 9? He is there, promise! What do you notice about the shape of these lists?

What stands out to me is that life did not end with Saul and his fallen sons, not even for his family line. Saul had a great grandson, Micah (not the prophet), whose family multiplied admirably, through to a generation with so many sons and grandsons (150!) even the Chronicles writers could not list them all. What looked like death, God turned into life.

What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

God can turn the tragedies which look the biggest to us into much bigger blessings over time. He works over a span of time which we might not be able to grasp, but with purpose and direction we can discern and follow if we choose to ask.

God wants us to ask. He has gifted us with a multiplicity of life and talent, including lines of people who specialise in things we don't dare to dream of doing ourselves, and he can lead a body of people to do much more than we can individually if we learn from Saul's example.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

Take time this week to ask God who else he might lead me to work with on things that I might have got on with alone if I had not asked.

Who am I going to share this with?

I don't know yet – I'll ask around!

Tuesday November 3: 1 Chronicles 11-14

God empowers faithful leaders to empower faithful leaders

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

What did I like about today's reading?

I am loving the massive contrast between David and Saul from the beginning of this passage. While Saul struggled and died in his own strength, David credited God immediately as the source of life and leadership. I believe he wasn't just saying that, but he meant and lived by it. This resulted in people coming together, with glorious results.

I'm noticing how David was not afraid to lead. His reliance on God did not make him unconfident or incapable of giving orders, nor did it make him think he could do everything by himself. Quite the reverse – he looked for leaders he could empower. And the warrior leaders who emerged were pretty powerful, even mighty!

I love the tales of derring-do which show how capable these men were individually, but looking more carefully, their roles were not just to strike down enemies and kill lions. They were empowered as commanders, entrusted with getting the best from other people.

So, this is not a Hollywood-style story of a few heroes. God's style is more about the bigger picture, as we've seen from the rest of Chronicles so far too. In this case, I think we are getting to see what can happen when a culture of faithfulness is planted in a field rich with talent and potential.

What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

God had already gifted Israel with huge amounts of people, talents and natural resources. When people are willing to follow his lead, all of this can be used together amazingly.

Where God's presence is recognised physically, as it was with the ark of the covenant, faithful following of God's instructions and respect for its special holy nature are vital. God's things are not ours to do with whatever we want. This is so important, it was the difference between life for Obed-Edom and death for Uzzah.

God is a faithful leader who empowers faithful leaders. This is his kingdom plan, for us all to know the importance of faithfulness and potential we have to bring out the best in others when we seek his presence and faithfully follow his guidance.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

I sometimes forget that leadership isn't just a job for other people. It's something we all have to the extent that we influence or bring out the best in anyone else. I want to be a better leader, in the way that God is a loving father and leader, rather than just a big boss.

So I will look for a way to practise faithfully crediting and obeying God this week.

Who am I going to share this with?

My family, where I'm already practising being a dad, and hopefully my school community too where I think we need some assurance and empowerment in a stressful time.

Thursday November 5: 1 Chronicles 15-17

God gives inspiration through arts and words

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

What did I like about today's reading?

I love what happens when David's understanding of how to be faithful to God gets turned into physical expression with hundreds of talented, faithful artists.

In our society, people enjoy the arts but some wonder about the point of them, and arts tend to get threatened first in times of funding crisis. But in Israel, look at how many people were born and destined for brilliance with musical instruments, singing, tailoring, visual arts, writing and finding the perfect words for just the right times. The Levites who led this ministry were not on the fringe of their culture either, but physically central along with God's presence at the heart of life, whether settled in the promised land or unsettled in the years of moving through the desert towards it.

Why is this important? It enables God to engage the nation and the world with far more than the idea of his existence. The presence of God is marked by a multi-sensory feast, engaging the eyes and ears, emotions and mind. It inspires joy and movement, encouragement and comfort, understanding and wonder.

A co-ordinated display like the one described in chapters 15-16 is about more than making a big show, too. It's a demonstration of faithfulness. The massive numbers are not just doing what they like individually but committing to follow leadership and each other in agreed patterns. God is not into boring sermons about this sort of thing – he gifts people with talent and inspires unforgettable experiences.

I also love how God's inspiration can be passed on through faithful prophets like Nathan. Look at how his first instinct is recorded, encouraging David to do whatever he has in mind. Prophets generally encourage! But when God directs him differently, he passes important instructions faithfully to David, and I love how David receives them. He realises that it is not his job to build a house for God, but God will build an everlasting house for him!

What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

God loves to receive our worship, but everything is based on what God gives us first. We have seen how God gives life, family and physical things like the earth, a place on it and a share of its fruitfulness. God also gives us the ability to appreciate the arts which can bring joy to us and glory to him, helping us to see and practise faithfulness like our creator when we get creative together.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

I'm inspired to have some conversations with creative people about ways we might be able to make good things to share over the next few months.

Who am I going to share this with?

Those people and others I follow Jesus with.

Friday November 6: 1 Chronicles 18-21

God gives strength to bring good life and justice. Bern Leckie writes:

What did I like about today's reading?

When it gets to the military battle bits of the Bible, I usually find myself distancing this from my own life. I'm so grateful that we have soldiers, but I don't want to be one, and I'm often stuck to find where the goodness ever is in war.

But reading about David's victories in the context of the rest of this story of God's provision, I'm reminded that God wants to give many of us a better life than the one we have. This is not so that he can satisfy our greed with more stuff, but so that we can overcome injustice and ill treatment, anger and fear, the products of self-centred life. It's a battle to replace these with love and the rest of the fruit of a God-centred life. Sometimes that battle is fought personally in the heart, but in Chronicles we also see it in large-scale, physical battles. God's establishment of a way of life centred on his presence did not take place in a vacuum but among competing, opposing forces and cultures.

What I love about these stories, apart from the odd gory details of massive weapons and "How many fingers did that guy have?!", is that God was clearly the source of Israel's strength. Each named fighter had victories to record, but their inspiration, direction, resources, relationships, purpose and practice of faithfulness came from God.

God was fulfilling his promise made to David to build a house for him. And what did David do with that house? He was "doing what was just and right for all his people." None of these battles were about acquiring shiny stuff for its own sake, but about building a culture where God would be recognised, and good life and justice would prevail.

So, what was the problem with David running a census? Scholars debate this – it could be that this was also a tax which David didn't need to impose, or that David was being proud or self-reliant. It strikes me that David was being foolish by, effectively, trying to measure how much water was in the tap. Israel's strength was not in numbers but in God and his promise to do what he said. Hadn't God demonstrated what he could do with a few people as well as with many? It's painful to see the impossible choice David had to make as he reconciled with God, but I love that David found within himself a voice for justice, a desire to sacrifice himself for his people and, following this, a God-given way to do this through worship.

What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

God gives us everything we need to fight the battles we need to overcome selfishness and injustice and replace them with justice, goodness and love. He also grows a desire in us for the things that he wants for us too, which can change our communities, not just ourselves.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

I want to reflect on God's purpose for us at this time when a battle against a virus has also revealed inequalities and injustices which should bother us. Where is God giving us strength, resources and a desire to fight for change? How can I respond to this faithfully?

Who am I going to share this with?

My family and other people I pray with.

Monday November 9: 1 Chronicles 22-25

God brings incredible resources and talent together. Bern Leckie writes:

What did I like about today's reading?

I love how everything in Chronicles has been leading up to this. We've seen lots of ways God has provided resources, people, inspiration, examples of faithfulness and leadership – everything a community needs to get Big Stuff Done.

Now the focus moves to Israel's first temple, a physical representation of God's presence, provision and power. The first thing which strikes me is sheer amount of luxurious bling David has procured for it: "more bronze than could be weighed," "more cedar logs than could be counted," and, among many other things, "a hundred thousand talents of gold," worth well over £100 billion at today's prices. But forget about that... what on earth could you possibly do with over 3,000 tons of gold? Can you even imagine?!

I love that David could. Not only that, he had been given the vision to enlist "craftsmen beyond number", thousands of worship leaders and musicians in 24 massive bands and, in more than you might expect for a worship place, "six thousand officials and judges." This was not just a place to sing nice songs but a house for justice and good life reflecting what God wants to provide, not just receive.

I'm struck by David's role in getting this together and how this is described. David has a keen sense of God's provision, including his inspiration and instructions. But the author credits David as the provider of the resources. This goes along with acknowledging the role of others like the Sidonians and Tyrians who brought him cedar logs in chapter 22, verse 4, and the role of Solomon to come who will be credited as the builder of the temple.

Crediting people for their roles is very important, but what I see here are the vital connections between people and God in providing, organising and creatively doing anything. Building new things is hard! It goes well beyond individual talent. Even the most independent creators had to get their inspiration from somewhere outside themselves. Whether or not we realise or choose this consciously, creative people are in partnerships with other creatives, diverse providers and, ultimately, with God.

What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

We know to read into this account that God has provided the massive abundance of stuff, talent and creativity needed for the massive temple project. But while God provides and directs, he also partners and gives responsibility and freedom for us to choose how we develop talent and put it to use. In this way, he makes us co-creators, joining in his family business of turning raw materials into valuable, inspirational, life-bringing works of wonder.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

Thank God for the roles and resources he has given me and others around me in his family and creative business, and seek his inspiration for work to do at Christmas and beyond.

Who am I going to share this with?

People at church where creative discussions are ongoing about things to make and share.

Tuesday November 10: 1 Chronicles 26-29

God's giving enables our giving in everlasting relationship. Bern Leckie writes:

What did I like about today's reading?

Big finish! I love how this account of music legend rock King David builds up through a huge overview of the nation to some surprisingly massive closing bangers. Yesterday's picture of large-scale worship and ministry is added to by today's, working outwards, of the handy gatekeeper muscle sourced from faithful Obed-Edom's family, through the administrators of money and stuff, to the surrounding armies and tribes. This was no small movement.

Yet at its centre, David had a singular vision of God's presence. I love how much he was prepared to move, calling in every favour and sparing no expense, to make a home for the ark of the covenant. I'm also amazed at how he was obedient to God's leadership, knowing that he would never see the completion of the work he was so passionate about. What sustained David through all this effort, knowing he would have to hand over to others who would get the credit for completion?

Did you spot his shocking statement in chapter 28 verse 4? "God... chose me from my whole family to be king over Israel for ever." He is what now? Some think this means he is a messiah yet to be reborn. But I think we've seen from the rest of this book that God made people to be more connected than we may think. We can't help but see the strength of family bonds in God's design for Israel, and I'm sure that when David accepted God's promise of the throne forever, he knew his family line would make that reality.

So, as he handed the temple building project to his son Solomon, I expect David felt this was his work too. I love picturing his excitement at seeing these incredible gifts coming together, and how the "the people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the Lord."

But there is one more thing David says which I find utterly disarming and life-changing, especially when I think about how to give my time, talent or treasure to anything. It is his acknowledgement to God that "everything comes from you... we have given you only what comes from your hand." This is a huge and vital admission. It's the most important theme for this whole book, I think, to recognise God's provision of everything we value. When I remember to apply that to my own time, relationships and materials, life makes sense!

What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

God wants us to know him as the source of everything we need and want, and as a loving Father who wants to see us grow and thrive in his family creative business. He also fulfils his promise to David for an everlasting kingdom to come through his family as Jesus is one of his descendants. Through him and the work he did for us on the cross, the Spirit which inspired David turns each of us into temples where he promises to live forever.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

Thank God for his giving to me, not just of stuff but new life, relationships, love and other spiritual fruit which is worth more to me as help to be a husband and father than all the gold in the world.

Who am I going to share this with?

My family.