



BIBLE IN A YEAR 2020



Summary

This is the story of the fall. Just like people fell from God's presence near the beginning of Genesis, a nation of God's chosen people, already divided into Israel and Judah, fell from faithfulness to God. By the end of this story, they are ejected from their promised land.

The writer focuses on leaders and their importance in this. God can be seen to act through prophets and priests too, and incredible things happen through Elijah's successor Elisha especially. But unless the nation can be guided by leaders who trust and respond to God, it can never represent God's Kingdom.

Thankfully, there are some good leaders here who give us hope and a pattern for what can happen. However, most are shockingly bad, full of pride, false belief about their own strength and questionable intent when it comes to serving for people's good.

Maybe there's a warning here for us, or at least guidance on what to look for in good leaders. There is also hope that while human folly and injustice will fall, God's leadership is needed, life can change and his Kingdom will come.

Bern Leckie

Tuesday June 9: 2 Kings 1-3

Are we looking in the right direction to find power?

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?

There are constant opinion polls running in the USA about whether the country is heading in the "Right Direction" or on the "Wrong Track." ([link](#)) While that is a matter of opinion, this is a story of what it means, what it looks like, to be on the Wrong Track when leadership fails. Crucially, it's also an account of God's response when Israel fractured, people broke the covenant with God, but God remained faithful, loving and determined to build his Kingdom.

There is a dizzying amount of detail here, but I love the clarity of the big story. Leaders like Ahaziah could hardly hope to lead in a helpful direction when they were looking the wrong way for help. It's not just that his faith was all over the place. Wasn't it also weirdly unwise to ignore God's power, proven through Elijah, in favour of a weak idea of a god?

I love the biblical stories of wise leaders when they seek to glorify God and their power is amplified. But when a leader won't do that, I love that God still works through prophets like Elijah and Elisha. It's sad that people could not look to a throne and see God at work, but look at where the real power is.

After Elijah's glorious exit, the Spirit working through Elisha could heal a land with a bowl of salt and tear down opposition with a shout. And some bears. (Note to self: don't be rude to prophets...) But these miracles are not magic tricks. We know how they work. What I love most here is that a word from God overcomes armies, bad leaders, unyielding nature and everything else which can get between the life we have and the goodness God wants for us.

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

God works, even when leaders don't. The way God works through prophets can seem bizarre, even shocking, but the raw power channelled through a Spirit-filled believer can be more effective at changing the world than an army of swordsmen or an alliance of countries. What God can do with leaders who are looking in the right direction is amazing, but when they are on the wrong track and powers clash, it's an awesome mess. Something will have to change. God and his Kingdom will ultimately prevail.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

I'm a fan of following the news and people who can comment on it with wit and insight. It gives me a sense of assurance that leaders with unhelpful aims or corrupt motives can be shown up, indicted and, in theory, replaced. But that doesn't mean we always pick better leaders to replace them – what if they keep getting worse? This story reminds me that I need to improve my benchmark for what is good and spend more time looking in the right direction at what God is doing and wants to do. He doesn't just work in history but now too.

Who am I going to share this with?

The people I discuss current events with, often on Facebook.

Thursday June 11: 2 Kings 4-7

God can show how much he values us

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?

In case we were in any doubt about where the power is in this story, God pours it out through Elisha. Does he remind you of anyone? He asked Elijah for a double dose of Spirit and there are exactly double the number of miracles credited to him. But it's not just that amazing things happened, it's what they mean to people that shows God at work.

I love the scope of what gets done through Elisha – blessings, healings, faith building, life changing stuff. Prophecy is far more than speaking about the future. It affirms life and value because it is passing on God's affirmation of life and value for us.

I especially love how the widow was freed in so many ways by the multiplying oil – not just from debts and slavery for her sons but from low expectations of herself and her value. God did not treasure her only because she was the wife of a prophet, even though society might only have supported her because of that status. The challenge for her was to avoid shrinking back and ask around for jars – “don't ask for just a few.” She was blessed in proportion to her response, which I guess was also in proportion to her faith that she could receive something of value by asking. God wanted her to know how valuable she would always be.

I think that's important to remember when hearing the gory stories of battles, here and the ones to come. Many of them make some life look like it has little value, and these are challenging stories. Does God only really love a few people, the ones who love him?

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

While God moves leaders, kingdoms and all kinds of opposition to the life he wants people to enjoy, I think there is a clue in chapter 6 that people whose hearts are close to God know how God values everyone, even enemies of his chosen people.

The army from Aram was blinded and stopped from attacking Israel, then led to a place where they could have been slaughtered. The king of Israel seemed keen to do this. But Elisha asked God to open their eyes, then asked the king to feed them. Having seen God's power, can we trust that Elisha's request showed God's will here? This was for restoration and, as it turned out at least for a time, this is why “the bands from Aram stopped raiding.”

What am I going to do differently as a result?

I've come to realise that when I get angry or resistant to people, it's often because I don't value them as much as I do myself, or anywhere near as much as God does. I don't like to think of myself as unloving, but I want to grow in how much I value (and, in practice, love) others. To do this, I need to spend more time seeking God's perspective like Elisha had.

Who am I going to share this with?

My family, where our top priority for parenting is for our son to know how loved/valued he is, followed by helping him practise and know how good he can be at loving/valuing others.

Friday June 12: 2 Kings 8-10

Some leaders are incredible to watch but impossible to follow

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've tried to tell people the story of Jehu, and I've no-one I've told who hasn't read it for themselves believes me that it's in the Bible. It's just... incredible.

Whatever hope we might have built up yesterday that God's power might be shown through a pure, healing, restorative lovefest, we have to put that to the side today. God does work through all sorts of people who are not as close to his heart as Elisha. Some of the leaders he works through are pretty hopeless.

The first clue to this might have been God's instructions on anointing him – do it quick, then run! God was not pouring out a healing bath, he was lighting a firework soaked in petrol.

The next is how people knew Jehu was coming from miles off because they recognised his mad driving! He had built a reputation long before he sniped his way to the top and callously crashed through Jezebel's best defences - her hair and makeup.

Then the story carries on like an action/horror movie, complete with double deals and deceptions, heads in baskets, great lines like "Take them alive! ... So they took them alive and slaughtered them..." and a crushing final defeat for the servants of Baal whose temple got turned into a toilet. "You have done well," said God...??!!!

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

God sometimes works in breathtaking ways. He also seems to love a good story, and knows that we will remember an incredible story like the time he gave Jehu licence to kick ass.

Does that mean that God wants anyone else to be like Jehu? I hope not. I don't think we could find anyone else like Jehu even if we wanted to. And it's clear that Jehu's heart was more in the fireworks than the faithfulness. He let Jehu's corrupt rule continue over a shrinking kingdom, attacked from all sides. Perhaps God can work through anyone, but his character can only be seen through people who love him and their neighbours and strive for peace, something Jehu seemed not to understand at all.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

I'm struck by a modern comparison with leaders who make a great show about strength, believing that overwhelming force makes them strong, but lead people to ruin when they fail to grasp the power of love, peace, humility, repentance, learning and true faith in God.

I want to get better at living that life myself as well as encouraging others to do the same, including leaders. After all, don't we want leaders we want to follow, not just watch?

Who am I going to share this with?

People I know who want better leaders in politics, including in our school community.

Monday June 15: 2 Kings 11-14

Thank God for a few good leaders (and the rest?)

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?

If last week's action story of Jehu in Israel was a bit much, today's episode of "meanwhile in Judah" is a refreshing contrast. I love how it shows God at work through another significant branch of his Kingdom design. When leaders fail, prophets can shine, and so can priests.

Jehoiada the priest was from a long family line dependent on God for life and provision. They practised closeness to God and enabled the nation to approach him. So I'm surprised that stories of priests changing the fates of nations are a bit rare, but this was one time.

I love how Jehoiada's faithfulness to God passed along into love and faithfulness for the infant king Joash, whose anointing within covenant relationships was the opposite of Jehu's hit-and-run installation. Jehoiada did what priests do, bringing people together in agreement with God, and this meant that Judah's branch of Baal's temple got dealt with, but instead of leaving behind a great story and a bad smell, it was replaced by renewed public commitment to worshiping and obeying the Lord.

I also love two pictures in chapter 12 of getting stuff done (and not.) It turns out the priests were great at collecting people's offerings of money and stuff, but it took over 20 years to realise this was not enough to rebuild the temple! Thankfully they eventually found the wisdom to ask people to bring themselves and their skills too, and instead of accumulating money, they were able to give it out, blessing all kinds of workers and suppliers. This gave Judah years of peace under king Joash.

Back in Israel, and afterwards in Judah too, leaders were not so good. There's destruction coming. But faith works; I love how even Elisha's bones could bring a dead man to life.

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

Even in turbulent times, God's blessing and favour could be clearly seen wherever people would turn to him. However, he lets people make mistakes and suffer the consequences, like when Joash's successor Amaziah let his ego lead Judah into unwise conflict with Israel.

God allowed bad leadership to continue, even though it resulted in bitter suffering. He had a bigger, better plan to redeem and restore people. We can see God at work around good and bad leaders, but just because they lead, it doesn't mean they are good.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

I'm wondering how much this informs our modern discussions about how we support and pray for leaders. 1 Timothy 2 urges us to pray and thank God for leaders, and some claim authority from God under Romans 13:1. They might still be awful. But I should pray more.

Who am I going to share this with?

People I discuss life, politics and prayer with, such as our online house group.

Tuesday June 16: 2 Kings 15-18

Bad leaders led to the fall of a nation

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?

Israel's depressing succession of rotten rulers ended with the result God had always warned about. The covenant agreement Israel accepted from God came with the understanding that if they rejected God, they would be ejected from his promised land, just as Adam and Eve had to leave the Garden of Eden. It's a sad echo of the original story of the fall of humanity.

I'm struck by the story of how Samaria was repopulated with Israel gone, with people who kept a mix of gods despite God sending lions (not great peacemakers or teachers) to show they were wrong. Even a priest of the Lord could not stop them from mixing recognition of God with pursuit of other gods "to this day", and apparently into Jesus' time too, judging by the conversation in John 4. This is one reason why Jesus' story about a good Samaritan would have been so shocking to the first people who heard it.

So what about Judah and David's family line? They had a mixed bag of leaders but Hezekiah was one of the better ones. He trusted in God, and God gave him success, even though his reign was not easy. Assyria were a constant menace, yet God would be glorified through the encounters.

We're only reading part of their big clash today, but I love how Assyria's field commander is reminiscent of the devil himself from Genesis 3. He lies, misrepresenting God and what it means to worship him, tempting the people with offers which sound like paradise (they sound a lot like God's promises to faithful people), exaggerating his power, even claiming God's backing for his own. This was a key test - would Judah repeat ancient mistakes and fail to recognise the real God at work? If not, how could they get out of this mess and prevail? Could anyone stop the king of Assyria? (cue cliff hanger music and join us for more on Thursday...)

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

God keeps his promises. Sometimes these are executed swiftly when people turn away from him, but other times there may be a long period while God allows his people to drift off, get warned, and decide for themselves what will happen next. God's plan to extend his Kingdom reign, justice and goodness will still prevail. Jesus even talked about how it would emerge in unexpected places, so it's not for us to judge people by their nation's reputation, but we are to depend on God directly and see how he works with people in surprising ways.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

I like to show off what I think I'm strong at, but I want to grow trust in God like Hezekiah. I can see from this story that my success in this can't be measured in riches.

Who am I going to share this with?

I don't know yet. I'm sure an opportunity will come up to share about how we trust in God.

Thursday June 18: 2 Kings 19-22

Trust in God is a powerful thing

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 Hezekiah's trust in God and Isaiah's prophetic role in encouraging this. I love how Hezekiah expresses that trust in prayer, acknowledging God's creation and ownership of everything, a far bigger power even than the mighty army which threatened Judah.

This combination of prophets, priests and kings can work pretty well together, can't it? God knows we need to hear and approach him before we can be led by him. Otherwise we can mislead ourselves into thinking that, just because we believe in God, we are led by him, while we might actually be lost in our own ideas instead.

Can anything get in the way of a leader who is committed to learning and following God? The Assyrians' defeat suggests not. But sadly there's always room for pride. Hezekiah's illness unfortunately seemed to shift his focus towards himself in a story repeated in Isaiah chapters 35 to 40. Despite the blessing of an extension to his life, his dealings with envoys from Babylon and his reaction to Isaiah's news that his descendants and Israel would be ruined, his main takeaway seemed to be relief that he would be fine.

I found it painful to read about Manasseh and Amon seeming to set Judah on course for this destruction. But I love how the prophet and priest helped king Josiah find clarity about God's will, trust in God's voice and peace thanks to God's intervention in his time.

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

God provides ways for people to know, trust and get close to him. When faithful leaders are guided by this, they can guide nations to peace in relationship with God.

Jesus provides a unique combination of prophet, priest and king in one person, so we can know God and the goodness he wants for us by following him. Our leaders can benefit from doing this too. But they need to be like Hezekiah in his best years, trusting God more than self and learning from experience following God rather than proudly claiming to have it all.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

I need to get better at trusting God and measuring my success in that by closeness to him rather than amount of "blessing" or stuff acquired. There may be things God needs to show me or, like Josiah, remind me about to follow him faithfully. I want a heart like his: "responsive... humbled...", especially when God's teaching might clash with my own ideas.

Who am I going to share this with?

Again, I don't know yet. I have various discussions in progress with people as we try to discern what God is saying and where he might be leading us. I'm conscious that sometimes I might confuse my own leaps of insight with revelation from God, and it would be rubbish to be misled like that. But I also trust that God can show us things which surprise us, especially as I expect following Jesus to result in changes of mind (Mark 1, Romans 12...)

Friday June 19: 2 Kings 23-25

Bad leaders must fall, but there's hope for the future

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?

The fall of Judah seems all the more dramatic after the glimpse of goodness they got from Josiah. I love the season of recommitment and revival, blessing and the best Passover ever.

So why didn't this turn Judah's fortunes around and stop the exile God warned about? The writer puts this down to God's anger, but there was another gaping, obvious problem. There were no good leaders left. Jehoahaz was old enough to know what he should do to please God but didn't. He lasted three months and managed to give away the nation's riches in that short time. Each successor was evil and God ushered in Judah's adversaries to clean up.

Now here is the bit I find amazing. Zedekiah has virtually nothing - no army, no workers to craft weapons, and no faith in God by this account of his evil doings. Yet he chose to rebel against Babylon. Was this the most pointless rebellion in history? God had given leaders victories over incredible odds, but Zedekiah wasn't trusting God, only his own strength, and he had none of that either. The result reminds of something Jesus says twice in Matthew's gospel about God's Kingdom. People who don't have (gracious blessing from God, and faith put into practice) will find that the little they do have (stuff, and the ability to choose) will be taken away. Zedekiah's final rebellion against God, powerful enemies and all reason resulted in the loss of Judah's identity, independence, freedom and all their remaining stuff.

What was God doing here? If he wanted his Kingdom to come, why did he not let his people defend the land for his glory? We know that God was angry and kept his covenant promise that rebellion would result in destruction. But that's not the whole story. God was going to build his Kingdom his way, for our benefit. There were still people with faith, they were just being moved away for now. One of the people taken into exile was Daniel, and God had great plans for him which would amaze everyone who heard about him to this day.

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

God wants us to recognise him in all circumstances, good and bad. He can bless people who choose to honour and obey him, and when leaders do this it can change history. But when leaders are not faithful to God, he will guide other people who look to him, perhaps in the most difficult times, in surprising ways.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

We are living in a challenging time and this makes me wonder: when challenge comes, what is worth defending? Not necessarily the old normal things. I want to get better at recognising God's leadership towards a new normal, his Kingdom, and following leaders who trust and follow him. I'm expecting God to change us a lot before the next election.

Who am I going to share this with?

The many people I seem to know who want to change the world but don't yet trust God.