



BIBLE IN A YEAR 2020



Summary

This book is both a summary of Moses' final days and a treaty summarising the covenant agreement God was forming with his chosen people, Israel, before they entered their promised land.

God marked out a way of life for Israel with reminders of his power and love for them, principles to guide their thinking and numerous laws to shape their lives in practice.

It also includes prophetic insight into the fact that people would struggle and fail to live by these laws, but there is hope for the future – and for us – in God's enduring choice to love and bring people to him by ways which were not known to Moses but can be known by us.

Bern Leckie

Monday July 20: Deuteronomy 1-3

Can we learn about God today from an old contract?

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?

How easy this book is to "like" depends on how you look at it. On one level, Deuteronomy has all the appeal of your bank's big book of terms and conditions, something you must have promised you read and agreed to, but most likely kept in a box somewhere only in case of dire problems later. It takes the form of a covenant treaty, reminding people of the agreement their ancestors made with God, the benefits of keeping it, the consequences of not. Most scholars believe it was put together very close to the national crisis of exile as people wondered why God might want his people to leave the land that he promised them.

So why read it now? On its own, that doesn't sound very appealing to me, and don't we have a new covenant with God in Jesus instead? We do, and that's one reason why many of the legal details don't sound like they are, or should be, part of our lives today.

But as well as treaty and law, Deuteronomy is also about people and God. This is what I love about it. Through dealings with people, including incredible, legendary leaders like Moses, God has revealed his character and intentions for humanity. This includes us.

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

It is God's world. We live in it. I'm struck by God's commands to Israel not to provoke various other people he established in other parts of his planet. I love that we are invited to see history here not through human struggles and accomplishments, but as God's work.

God's faithfulness and love can be seen. Look at how Israel remembers through this story that they came from tiny beginnings and grew "as numerous as the stars in the sky". This growth reminds me of Jesus' pictures of the coming Kingdom of God as the tiniest mustard seed which becomes a tree big enough to accommodate life. The same God grew Israel and grows us through faith in Jesus too.

God remains concerned that we trust him and don't rebel against him. This massive ongoing theme in scripture gets illustrated in the struggles of people and the fates of nations. If you've followed any other Bible with us, you'll be familiar with it! But it's still an issue in life.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

I'm feeling conflicted as I approach this book, even though it's familiar in many ways. I need to resist my internal urge to filter and skip over the bits which I can most easily dismiss as "out of date" and choose to seek God's character in it.

Who am I going to share this with?

Not sure yet. I know some Christians who are very relieved we don't have to stick to all of the upcoming laws, but we may still struggle with obeying God in other ways. I'd like to look and figure out with them how God might be grabbing our attention with a challenging book.

Tuesday July 21: Deuteronomy 4-6

Love God with all your heart

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?

Deuteronomy has its weird, hard and controversial bits, for sure. But this, I believe, includes what Jesus pointed to as the Most Important Bit.

Central to it are the most famous laws in the Old Testament, the things Jesus asked people if they stuck to, the foundation of western legal philosophy, and ten solid points in a pub quiz if you can remember them in order. I love that Israel remembers them as God-given, the world's first tablet download from the cloud, and that many still literally tie them to their bodies and write them on their door frames. I love that they were never merely human wisdom for peaceful living, nor the imposition of overbearing religious authority, but gifts from a loving God who also provided his land, unearned material, grace and freedom.

So which is the Most Important Bit, according to Jesus, the Greatest Commandment? It turns out to be the one which is hardest to legislate. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." (Deut. 6:5) He calls it "the first" commandment (Matthew 22:38), although your pub quiz master might not accept his answer (check chapter 5 again!)

But what happens if we take Jesus' word over anyone else's? What if we choose to see love as the primary thing, the greatest, the foundation of all of the rest? Does that change the way we see the rest of the laws, or even the rest of life?

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

The rules in Deuteronomy can seem like an onerous imposition, an impossible burden and, as New Testament teachers like Paul have pointed out, ineffective at producing a right relationship with God. They are more likely to convict us to death than spark us to life.

But seen the way Jesus relates them, with love as the primary thing, this isn't simply a command from God which is impossible to measure. It's what God has done and keeps doing first. God's love brought everything into being, nourished Israel into a nation and provided his whole motivation to guide people into a good life and relationship with him.

With our experience of God's love growing in us as the fruit of the Spirit, we can also grasp something these Israelites might have missed. God never intended his most important command to be impossible. His plan was to enable us to live and obey it by his grace.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

Marvel at God's provision of all things so we can live out his commands, then seek to obey.

Who am I going to share this with?

My family and others I follow Jesus with.

Thursday July 23: Deuteronomy 7-10

Remember who gives you the ability

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?

This is a tricky passage to get into. Yes, it's about invasion, war, destruction, "no mercy". And then it's about love – lots of love! How does that reconcile?

I think this is simply an impossible circle to square by our own standards. We have human rights questions, but God has a plan which is not fully apparent or explained here.

A mistake we could make is trying to take God's role and work out a better plan here. How about we all get along? Can't we just live and let live? I want to say that, but I recognise that it's also, sort of, the problem. People doing their best to work things out by themselves led to all kinds of injustices and some monstrous errors. Other stories make clear that the religions God was ordering Israel not to mix with were not harmless. Some demanded human sacrifices, rape or abuse. All promised more divine power than they could deliver.

But still, who are we to judge? If that's what you are thinking, I think that's a GREAT attitude. Judging isn't for us. But the point of this story was that, in this case, Israel had not appointed itself judge over other nations. It was instead following the judgement of the earth's creator who alone knew what would happen to conquered souls in terms of eternity, justice and grace. Where we cannot see past death and loss, God can.

What I love about the bulk of this passage is how clear God wants Israel to be that they haven't won any victories, found freedom, grown a nation, made money or built anything to boast about in their own strength. It's all the work of God. Forgetting that would be tragic.

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

God chose to act in a world which could not, and seemingly did not want to, find him by human effort. So he chose a small people to multiply, blessed them in ways which could only be credited to him, and set out to show the world through them that a God-centred life would not just be possible but massively beneficial. God's plan was to light a beacon of love.

However, God also knew that changing the inclination of the human heart would not be easy or quick. Perhaps he could have made people think differently, but instead he gave freedom, the ability to choose to follow his way or not.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

Reflect on the freedom God continues to give, and the love God expects and enables me to show. I will reaffirm to God that I recognise my abilities, including to love, come from him.

Who am I going to share this with?

I rely every day on love from God to pass on as a parent, so I will share with my family.

Friday July 24: Deuteronomy 11-14

This way to a new life

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?

While there is a lot of difficult detail in this passage, I love the sense of change and potential that God is creating. This whole book is a covenant treaty and it frames new instructions for living with stories showing why big changes are necessary and made possible by God.

The world in which these stories are set is far, far from perfect, and life is difficult for many people in different ways. One example is the effort needed simply to carry on existing, especially if growing food is difficult, the climate challenging and the land unyielding. Egypt, described in chapter 11, was relatively well developed and fruitful, but it sounds a bit like the product of the fall in Genesis 3. Cut off from God's direct presence, people would have to sweat and toil to gain anything from the land.

I love the contrast in the description of Israel's promised land, that it "drinks rain from heaven" as well as flowing with milk and honey. It's almost like being let back into Eden and restored by the presence and blessings of God. This is what Israel wanted. This is the direction God was setting. Move this way, physically and with your hearts, and be restored.

It's mainly believed that Deuteronomy was written long after Moses and by people well informed by history that this ideal state was not sustained. People took the promised land physically, but their hearts did not make the leap. The closeness to God, purity, generosity and justice described were simply not what the writers saw. And yet they saw the direction God had set for them by the covenant and stories remembered. Could they still get there?

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

God works across history towards a restoration of closeness between people and himself. He knows that we have a distance to travel and need guidance along the way. So he gave many detailed, prescriptive laws for Israel to govern aspects of life, worship, relationships and lifestyle – even down to details of what could be eaten or not.

These laws sometimes had health benefits, but sometimes simply required people to accept God's rule and moderate their conflicting desires. They were guiding people to him. We know from Peter's visions in the New Testament that God can allow all food to be eaten, so the laws in themselves are not God's final destination for us. He is. But for us to be restored to closeness with God, he has to guide us through changes of mind, heart, desires and life.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

I'm grateful that Jesus called people to follow him in order to find closeness to God. While we don't have these laws, God still wants our minds to be changed by him. I must let him.

Who am I going to share this with?

People I pray and follow Jesus with – we need to be mindful that "repent" is his lifelong call.

Monday July 27: Deuteronomy 15-18

Nothing is more valuable than our relationship with God

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?

As an alternative to jetting away on summer holidays, we've been exploring the world from a distance, immersing ourselves in cultures, languages, music, food and TV which feel refreshingly different from ours. I'm getting the same feeling from observing the life of Israel through today's passage. Ancient festivals! Laws about sacrifices! Good treatment of slaves! These feel a long way from where we are, even though I know we are connected.

But where are those connections between the plan God rolled out for early Israel and anything which could shape our "new normal" for the better today? I'm struggling to find them in the details, many of which are specific to this faraway place and time, but can we discern any principles on which the laws were built which might endure today and beyond?

The biggest one, I feel, is that God has always wanted people to know that we shouldn't fall into the trap of thinking that anything in the world belongs to us more permanently, securely and with any more value than our relationship with him. Most of these laws are simply ways of showing that in practice.

One surprisingly radical one which I love is God's command for the regular cancellation of debts among his people. It's hard to imagine people being faithful to this, especially in the detail of remaining open-handed shortly before debts would be cancelled. In fact, history shows, this was a problem, and the writer reflects this with tension like this: "There need be no poor people among you" (15:4) vs. "There will always be poor people in the land." (15:11). I've sadly heard Christians excuse poor welfare provision and minimal compassion by leaning on Jesus quoting the latter (Matthew 26:11). But it couldn't be any clearer here that poverty is not the state God wants people to be in, but a sign that those of us with stuff need to treat it as God's stuff, ready to be moved around, rather than our own held tightly.

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

God loves us and cares about our quality of life. He gave specific instructions to ancient Israel based on love and concerns which endure today. He wants us to grow relationship with him, providing prophecy so people can hear his voice, times to remember and celebrate significant parts of our life's story with him, and ways of challenging our natural tendency to look after ourselves first with instructions to treat others with compassion.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

Listen better for God's guidance on how to treat our current good fortune with well-paid work and be looking out for where our neighbours need anything we can help with.

Who am I going to share this with?

People in our local community, especially families of Noah's school friends.

Tuesday July 28: Deuteronomy 19-22

The Kingdom means nothing without a King

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 like the big idea that God is concerned for people's welfare, and this leads a whole Kingdom way of life for his people. In this life, God wants to protect the innocent, the falsely accused and even people whose actions resulted in death as long as their hearts were not set on killing. The state of our hearts is paramount to God, who instructed only those with strong hearts and no significant distractions to go to war, and upheld the rights of women against mistreatment, and those of families against unfairness.

However, some of these rules seem a bit strange, at least by our standards. There are practical reasons for not mixing types of seed in a vineyard and for not yoking animals of unequal size and strength together. But what about wearing blends of wool and linen, or needing tassels on every cloak? These laws symbolise things, like the importance of purity and remembering God's commandments. They also demonstrate the sovereignty of the King who has the right to issue instructions even if we don't understand the reasons for them.

Some of the detail is scary: death for adulterers and rebellious sons, for example. While something in me deeply wants to protest this, I'm reminded of a couple of important things. If God is King, he makes the rules, not me - his standards aren't voted on for general approval, they are more timeless and permanent. I'm also extremely glad that we live in covenant relationship with Jesus, and while the purpose of the law is fulfilled in this, we don't have to sign up to every detail of activity laid out in this passage.

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

God's Kingdom plan to eliminate evil and restore closeness between people and his love has been growing for a long time. God provided specific laws to ancient Israel to shape its growth and knew, all along, that Jesus' life would change a lot for us. By taking the penalty for our rebellion and giving examples of good life and the Spirit to guide us, we can enjoy freedom from sin as part of Kingdom life today.

But Kingdom also means accepting the authority of the King, even when we don't understand. God reserves the right to command us, expecting obedience in faith, rather than wanting us to rely on our own understanding and efforts to build his Kingdom.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

Rely more on God's power and improve my obedience to him while seeking God's Kingdom during our times of difficulty and injustice. Jay Pathak from Mile High Vineyard in Denver gave us [a great talk about this on Sunday](#) – when we remain in Jesus and obey his authority, God makes his power evident in us, and this changes our world.

Who am I going to share this with?

My family and others I pray with.

Thursday July 30: Deuteronomy 23-26

Can we accept the King's authority?

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 like that more is revealed here about God's character. His wants people to be close to him, pure in their physical and mental lives, and honest and compassionate in their dealings with other people. In particular, I noticed the provisions people were expected to make for strangers passing through their property - people should be able to take all the grapes and grain they can eat or carry, reminding people with property that they were really looking after God's land and produce rather than defending their own.

Are there still difficult bits in this passage? Yes - plenty! God's decision to exclude certain kinds of people, and all their descendants, from his assembly doesn't square with our modern expectations. While I don't understand and want to speak up, I'm reminded that God has sovereign authority – the Kingdom means nothing without the King, right?

That takes me right into the heart of why this book feels like a struggle when trying to apply it to life today. It's also why I'm glad to be taking it in during a walk with Jesus through Luke's gospel. Normally our Bible In A Year daily episodes are entirely self-contained, but this feels like time for a crossover special!

The sense I'm getting from Luke is that the struggle to recognise and obey God's sovereignty was just as real centuries after these laws were given, even – no, especially – for so-called experts in the law. Is that because the King's commands are too difficult, or because we struggle to give away authority over ourselves? If the latter, what is God's plan for us?

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

God's long-term plan to restore relationship with people requires that we recognise his authority. In the covenant agreement with Israel before Jesus, God provided a clear structure through laws to set out a way of life in which this could be done. But God also knew that people would need more than laws - we would also have to realise our need for more of God's presence, power and authority, found in Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

I need to keep reflecting on how much I really accept God's authority, especially when it seems to involve an uncomfortable change of mind or lifestyle. I remain thankful that I live under a new covenant in Jesus, but I want to reaffirm my commitment to accept him as Lord rather than rely on trying to master my own understanding of everything he wants, as if I could get to a point where I don't have to ask and could never be surprised by Jesus!

Who am I going to share this with?

People I pray and follow Jesus with.

Friday July 31: Deuteronomy 27-30

Choose life

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 the physical manifestations of this process that Israel is on to seal their agreement to go with God on a journey into covenant life in a new, promised land. As they readied to cross into that land, they would line up half the country on one mountain facing the other half on a different mountain. They would all join in the promises to keep the covenant, acknowledging curses which would follow breaking the law and disrupting the covenant relationship. With their feet on the mountain rock and the law set in stone, how could they not feel strengthened and empowered for permanent establishment by God?

I'm loving the delicious detail and drama of the blessings and curses described too. The blessings are both heavenly and practical, down to earth necessity, from what they need to survive to what they knead in the kitchen. And the curses range from relatable annoyances to horrific stuff which is far too scary to talk about in Sunday School. With details as specific as "Your ox will be slaughtered before your eyes, but you will eat none of it", I feel like God has got everyone's attention.

It's the most comprehensive comparison of good life versus bad life, and tragic because we know from history that people turned away from God despite the consequences.

However, I love that God knew this would happen and planned an ongoing hope. He kept his promise to "circumcise your hearts" both through the work of his Spirit through faithful people in Israel's history and especially through Jesus. The chance to "choose life" remains.

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

God wants people to know, trust and follow him, but he leaves the choice about whether or not to do this ultimately to us. While people might arrange their lives to restrict faith and religion to personal ideas and occasional practice, God's involvement with the world is much bigger. He doesn't offer the choice between a good idea or a bad one, or a satisfying religion against a dull one. He needs us to remember that he has set before his people the choice between "life and death", and urges us to choose life.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

Remember and take more seriously what a big deal sin is to God, and thank him more that life in Jesus is not so much a catchy idea or a popular religion, but the way to life itself.

Who am I going to share this with?

I'm looking for opportunities to talk about faith with colleagues and neighbours, and I think there will be something from this graphically illustrated choice between life and death which can get into good conversation - but I don't yet know what and when.

Monday August 3: Deuteronomy 31-34

I did it whose way?

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?

And now, the end is near. For such a significant figure in Israel's history, I love that Moses' final curtain call was such a unique, unforgettable performance. He was to tell the nation what a terrible audience they were (or were going to be) in the form of a song written by God himself, to be sung by everybody.

It's quite a long song. I'm not sure which bit is the hook. But it has memorable themes which repeat throughout the unfolding history of God's people. God is great and worthy of praise, but people will keep going different ways, their own ways, towards falsehoods and away from love and wisdom. This will keep happening despite God's promised calamitous consequences raining down and despite, apparently, the nation having been given a mighty rock opera of their perilous future to sing. Maybe "Oh praise the greatness of our God!" was the only catchy bit which stuck in their heads.

This makes me wonder why, as God knew how this would work out, he set them on this path. Why did he call them to be his own? What else did he know about these people?

Plenty, it turns out. I love the phenomenal blessings in chapter 33 which Moses was inspired to pour out. They aren't simply good wishes but powerful prophetic observations of character and what each tribe could expect. They could live by these blessings, using them as constant reminders of how they stand in relationship with God who knew all of their flaws but still chose to adopt and love them as a father.

Ultimately, this is what defined Israel and can define us too. Our life does not have to be about how great we are. It can be defined by how great God is, if we can remember how he chose us, and if we remember and choose to say we didn't do it our way, but his way.

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

God remembers and chooses to love us. He gives us a choice between going his way in life towards more love and blessing or going different ways instead, which can have painful consequences.

God marked out his way to Israel with laws but walks it for us with Jesus who calls us to go with him. He does not leave us to work it out by ourselves, even living in us now as we go.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

Thank God for what I'm learning from a historical reminder of what can happen when anything gets in the way of closeness to God, and spend more time consciously walking with Jesus rather than thinking that faith is just an idea, belief or set of rules to try and follow.

Who am I going to share this with?

My family and others I follow Jesus with.