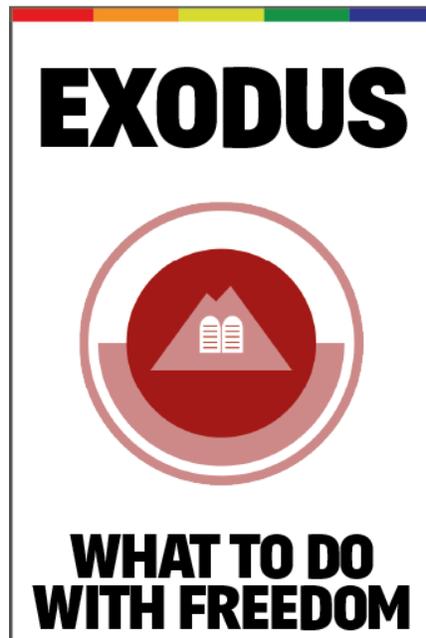




BIBLE IN A YEAR 2020



Summary

This is the story of God's people being rescued from slavery and brought into a new relationship with God.

This new life is the birth of a nation chosen to show the world how to find freedom from darkness and destruction and start building a society in the light of God's wisdom and love.

Bern Leckie

Monday January 27: Exodus 1-4

“He’s not the messiah, he’s a very naughty boy...”

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 scope of God’s co-working ranges from babies to world leaders. His plan to free his people from misery and establish new life with him as king has his fingerprints all over it. His unlikely chosen instrument is a baby boy given to his parents, not conceived by them. The boy escaped death at an early age and went on to be a leader empowered by God.

Does this remind you of anyone? Moses isn't exactly Jesus - he's flawed, lurching between anger and timidity, riddled with self doubt - but the important thing is that God chose him. This isn't just a story about a country from long ago, it's a message packed with meaning about what it means for God's kingdom to come and his will to be done today.

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

God chooses to work with people, not just for or against them. While God has the power to do what he wants independently of people, his aim is to bring people with him, and he will stretch a long way to work in less than ideal situations.

The story makes it clear that there was lots of resistance from God's chosen leader. Moses was meant to articulate God’s power, but maybe did a better job of putting our fears and doubts into words, at least at first. God’s perseverance with him and his provision of help, from miraculous signs to a partner in Aaron, shows his commitment to build and make the most of people’s strengths.

We are going to see a lot of incredible God stuff soon, from divine power to a whole system of religious rules, but I think it’s good to see how developing people’s potential in good relationships with him is at the heart of God’s fatherly kingdom intent.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

I've said it before, I'll probably need to say it again - trust God more, worry less.

Who am I going to share this with?

I have a lot to learn about how other people see God, especially people from other faith backgrounds in our school community. Not everyone wants to call him “Father”. But I’m pretty sure that all of us who believe in God agree that he is amazing. So I’m going to find a chance to share my amazement at God’s power and choice to work with people here.

Tuesday January 28: Exodus 5-8

God's guidance is not always subtle

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 do we think we know what God is saying to us? Some don't believe we can ever know, even if God is real. But here, I love the pattern God lays down for people to know his voice for sure – prayer (as God speaks directly with Moses), prophecy (Aaron is called to relay God's words faithfully) and power (God backs up his promises in ways we can't miss, even if we might try and explain it away.)

One thing which always puzzles me about Pharaoh is how God seems to keep playing with him, hardening his heart and making the bad situations worse. But did God made him any more flawed than he already was? Pharaoh was a textbook example of pride and resisting God, wanting to have his own way. In that way, this isn't just a story about him, it's about all human resistance to God, including ours.

One weird detail stood out to me as a plague of blood threatened the nation. Why would Pharaoh want his magicians to do the same thing again, increasing the harm on his people? I think he was maybe much less interested in his country than he was in his sense of getting things done his own way, by his own power. God could only appear real and meaningful to Pharaoh at his breaking point, and that was tragic. God's work was to reconcile people to himself, but this story shows the ultimate results of choosing to believe in him or not.

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

God will go to extreme lengths to show people who he is, what he is like and what he wants for us. He also knows our hearts, motivations and desires. For people determined to oppose him, life can be very difficult indeed. But for people who want a relationship with him and believe, God's power works for them in awesome ways.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

I wonder if there are situations coming where God might want me to do and say exactly as he says? I'd better get better at listening to God and responding, just in case. I'm encouraged that God provides what we need and can team us up where we still need help, so I need to grow in trust that when God tells me to do something, his power will be working.

Who am I going to share this with?

I recently engaged with some Immanuel prayer where I believe I received guidance from God to get ready to make a move, empowered by gospel of peace, perhaps to share it. I'm going to look and listen for where this seems to be needed and where God seems to be guiding in our community.

Thursday January 30: Exodus 9-12

A dinner date to remember

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?

Was Pharaoh incredibly dense, or just proud? It's very dramatic, but not exactly incredible, that someone opposed to God can go to such lengths to try and have their own way rather than accept that they are massively out-powered. It's a shocking and tragic story for the Egyptians, and a warning for anyone else who wants to dig in against God.

What I like is that God, with divine power and efficiency, is doing three amazing things at once with the Passover. Firstly, he is saving his people from their slavery in an unforgettable way. Secondly, he is bonding a nation around a shared story, packed with powerful symbols which represent God's greatest purposes as he works to bring people back to himself. It's a memorable, shareable story which engages all the senses, and it is not just told in words, it is acted out with a meaningful shared meal which would be celebrated many centuries later.

Finally, although this was not revealed at the time, God is setting up for his ultimate display of power through Jesus, whose blood is our sign of inclusion in God's people and of protection from his wrath. Every communion is a celebration of this, and it fulfils God's promise that his name would be proclaimed in all the earth.

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

God really knows us well. Telling us what to do is one thing, but showing us who we are by engaging us with stories, experiences, shared memories and food - well, that's what works for me.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

I want to get better at engaging people through stories and experiences. I also want to glorify God more by showing people where the best stuff comes from.

Who am I going to share this with?

I have been struggling to get some podcast ideas off the ground for what seems like forever now. They all involve stories of some kind, and most of them involve God too. I need to get on and make some of them! (Let me know if you'd like to chat and maybe join in!)

Friday January 31: Exodus 13-16

God delivers, provides and builds

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 think it's amazing how many different ways God provides for his people in this short section of Exodus: guidance for the leaders and a physical presence to rally and direct the people, a unique and high profile escape route, destruction of their enemies, long lasting memories, a spirit of praise to turn this into song, food, and a schedule for the food which underlined some of the values of God's kingdom such as the importance of "daily" and the value of a Sabbath rest.

All of this was laid on in the expectation of a growing relationship between God and people, but what's even more amazing is how people (including me) can easily forget what a great provider God is when life gets uncomfortable and we turn back in on ourselves. Look at how quickly people turned from miracles to moaning.

This makes me wonder – how much is my faith and praise for God linked to my comfort? But it also amazes me – God didn't turn his back on his people, and supported them through an incredible challenge of change.

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

God means it when he says that his kingdom is coming, and when Jesus told us to pray for this, and for God's unstoppable will to be done, he was pointing us to partner with him.

God wants to be seen working so that people can build trust and relationship with him. In this story, the food supply required people to grow their faith in God, trusting that there would be fresh manna ("What is it?" = Wotsits?) every day it was needed. Even more trust was needed around the Sabbath. God was training people, establishing trustworthy patterns of provision. God knows that our trust and relationships grow over time, and wants our trust in him to grow strong.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

Pay more attention to how God might be guiding me. Remember the relationship God wants to have when things seem difficult. And thank him for his provision next time I eat Wotsits.

Who am I going to share this with?

I am hoping that we'll have a group assembling for a SHAPE course this term, and as we grow to know who God has made us to be, this will be a great time to remember and share how we know we can trust him.

Monday February 3: Exodus 17-20

Now we are free, what should we do?

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 practical help God's people get in this passage. From being physically provided for and having their enemies defeated when the leaders trust in him, to being realistic about spreading the burden of leadership, we're seeing guidelines emerge for a life with God which is liveable.

Some think of the "ten commandments" and the rest of God's Old Testament law as religious symbols of restriction rather than freedom. Wouldn't that be ironic? God only just freed his people from slavery! Was that to enslave them to religion instead?

While there is plenty of stuff coming up for people to wrap into a religious system, what I like about the first principles of law revealed here by God is that his intention is simple, practical and relational. Every command to people here is to improve relationships, with God and other people.

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

God wants his people to be free and to be guided into using their freedom well.

One thing I know from my freelancing experience – I don't always use my freedom well. Sometimes I get bogged down with stuff and forget about people. I can get distracted and, without some guidelines, fail to get anything meaningful done.

But God cares deeply that our lives are fruitful, meaningful and connected with him. So he shows how we can live most fruitfully, recognising him, in good relationship with him and the people around us. God wants us to know how to do this practically. He does not just hope that we work it out with our freedom but calls us to choose to trust and obey him.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

Recognising God and choosing to put him first in everything is the key to the whole thing. I am sure that this is not about doing lots of church stuff. I want to grow in relationship with God in all my family and work life. I need to get better at ensuring that God has a Sabbath-shaped space in my life to be visible in between work commitments.

Who am I going to share this with?

I want to understand how people with different faiths in our school community see and live out the balance between freedom and commitment to obeying God. I want to show how my faith works in practice, but it's not easy to do directly sometimes. However, this looks like a good topic to discuss with some of them.

Tuesday February 4: Exodus 21-24

God rules

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 the shift from story to rules always feels difficult for me when going through the Bible, I like that God knows how important this question is for all of us – how do we know what is right?

When we have freedom, our choices can be overwhelming. This is not a new 21st century thing, although we probably all feel the effects of being spoilt for choice. How many arguments have you seen, or taken part in, online where facts and opinions seemed mixed up and passions rose over vaccination, climate change or Brexit? How can we know what is right and how best to treat each other without a shared framework for viewing the world?

I think that God is supplying his people with much more than details for practical living here. He is building a framework for life with him, his love and justice at the centre. It's hard to know exactly how to live, but God was making it possible to know him, and life would follow.

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

"Eye for eye, tooth for tooth" is a memorable standout detail of how people should respond to injury and injustice. Does that mean that God is vengeful? It could, from this alone, or it may simply mean that he is just.

However, I have come to believe that there is a direction of travel in the Bible, progress in God's kingdom from beginning to end. Human life near the beginning of Genesis was described as vengeful, amplifying injustice by pushing back harder against every hurt. God puts a lid on that here. Following his framework, we must limit our responses to aggression by being measured and proportionate. Was that the end of God's plan? No, just the beginning. Keep going in that direction, from pushing back harder to proportionately, and we'll eventually reach where Jesus takes us, loving enemies, blessing those who curse us, forgiving. That's where God's kingdom is taking us. Are we there yet?

What am I going to do differently as a result?

I like to think I'm right a lot of the time, too much to be honest. I'm reminded from this that I have a way to go before my life looks like the life God wants me to have. I'm very grateful that the way for us to get there isn't by following rules as much as following Jesus, so I'm going to spend more time this week with him bringing choices and questions in prayer.

Who am I going to share this with?

Don't know yet, but I would like to share with someone else I pray with this week.

Thursday February 6: Exodus 25-28

Direction + creative skill = inspiration for all

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 a freelance creative person, I find some clients easier to work with than others. The worst either meddle in every detail, making it clear that I'm only an extra pair of hands for them, or give no direction at all, perhaps because they don't know what they want, or maybe they do but expect that I should know too because their desires are obvious and "correct." Either way, there is likely to be frustration at some point.

I like that God seems to a better client for what sounds like a multitude of creative, skilled people here. At times he is very precise in direction, to the point where we can form a pretty clear picture of what he wants made, but he also expects people to bring and make the most of their craft skill.

And I love that this is all being done for a purpose, to focus all people's attention on God, inspire worshipful giving "from everyone whose heart prompts them to give", and craft it into special, meaningful, lasting structures and symbols which show Israel and the world what a relationship with God looks like. This equips and inspires God's people for many years of worship, seeking and celebrating God's presence among them.

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

The creator values creativity, craft and close relationship with his people. Just as his work was to bring created order about, he wants to engage his people in the joy of bringing precious things together for a purpose. Just as God gave us life, he wants us to join him in giving our lives, skills and stuff in worship.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

Increase my appreciation of creative work as worship, and listen to see if God wants to be more specific about what he wants me to put together.

Who am I going to share this with?

Will any of my clients, present or prospective, want to share a love of God's inspiration? Not many of mine do, I feel at the moment. But I can think of people who might like to discuss what makes a great (or nightmare) client! This is an interesting example to share with them.

Friday February 7: Exodus 29-32

After the conference, the crash

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?

Don't you love holy conferences like Soul Survivor or Spring Harvest? Maybe I'm showing my age, but Moses did one before any of us. Up on the mountain, surrounded by God's presence, the plan looked great. Moses got it all from God in vivid detail, he loaded up on vision for how worship and life should look, and he came out of the incense-making workshop with God's special copyright formula. He had even rocked the productive life seminar, excited that God had given specifically skilled workers and a weekly rest day as part of the covenant agreement. All set! Let's get on with it! Singing all the way home!

So imagine Moses' surprise after the conference when real life confronted him with chaos. What happened, Aaron? While Moses had the mountaintop experience, his trusted partner absorbed everyone else's fears and doubts, bent to the people's will to craft an idol and later taking none of the responsibility. God unexpectedly brought Moses to share in his frustration with sinful people, and Moses' reaction was literally to break the covenant agreement he carried.

I'm amazed that none of this would be a surprise to God. He knew what would happen while he took time with Moses to lay out the plan anyway. In response to the people's actions, Moses and God seemed to temper each other. Anger which could have been totally destructive was still serious but measured, even purposeful. God and Moses had become closer. I love that God respected and supported Moses' leadership and changed his plans after Moses pleaded on behalf of the people.

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

When God says something should and will happen, he knows what will get in the way before it does. Even though we have become corrupt and prone to wander, God works through relationship to lead leaders with a passion for his people.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

While there aren't any perfect human leaders in Exodus, I'd rather be like Moses, close and obedient to God, than Aaron, who was far from God and much closer and responsive to people in this part of the story. When would I need to choose? That might be hard to tell. So while I can't yet see the time when I might need to reject what people are asking for, I can commit to spend more time consciously seeking what God wants.

Who am I going to share this with?

Next time I discuss faith-related projects intended to reach an audience, like podcast ideas, this needs to come up!

Monday February 10: Exodus 33-36

Let's make a bigger conference 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?

In the previous chapters of Exodus, the story was told of what happened when Moses had a conference with God but everyone else was excluded, and their fears and doubts took their hearts and worship in a different direction.

But I love that God's intention was to bring all of his people into his presence. This was going to be a big conference, with a tent and everything! Not only that, but it was not going to be a faraway, occasional experience – it would even travel with them. People no longer had to feel far from God, and there would be a visible sign of his presence among them.

I also love that the recognisable glory and presence of God inspired people to give the best of themselves, their skills and their stuff. They gave so much, they had to be restrained! Just hearing the list of what got made felt overwhelming – can you imagine seeing it, walking through it, letting it point the way from where you are to God?

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

God is faithful. He keeps his commitment to meet with and strengthen those who want to follow him. He also does not simply show up, but partners with people so that his presence is not just recognised thanks to a flame or cloud, but through the work of people who used their freedom to choose to give generously for his glory.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

Check my heart attitude when I seek to meet with God. Although I can't ever get away from the presence of God, I would like to have the kind of meetings with God that Moses had, and be part of a movement of people towards God which can be as generous as these people. I need to desire more to be taught God's ways, not just seek God's blessing to do things my own way, and I need to be more open to giving generously.

Who am I going to share this with?

Our family finances have felt challenged in the last year, and this has put a restraint on what we feel able to give away. But it's time to review what we want to give, of ourselves as well as stuff, and talk about our desires and vision together.

Tuesday February 11: Exodus 37-40

Is Is that that an an echo echo??

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 comfortable familiarity of most of what is described here. While it might have seemed strange earlier in Exodus, the repeating descriptions of what people made at God's command to help recognise and worship him are now seeming like a pattern which points the way to God.

It's like there is an echo in Exodus which reveals the substance of what God wanted people to join with him to make. There is a structure which receives his people and their praise, echoes and even amplifies it.

What started with one man's faith in a crowd of doubters has become a shared vision, a vibrant conference, an astonishing multiplication of individual gifts and skills into enough bling to be visible from space, all so that God could be recognised and worshipped. Do you hear that echo, the feedback loop linking what God gives to what we can give? It's more than a structure for religious ceremonies, it's a resonance between God's heart and ours.

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

God knows what he is doing. He doesn't call us to worship him so that we grudgingly give a bit of time feeling awkward, sounding uncomfortable and looking silly. He invites us to partner with him, in his presence, so that we can grow in faith and familiarity with him.

God gives people the freedom to choose life which reveals the reality of his presence and power. When we choose that, we get guidance, and sometimes the patterns of what God expects don't seem to make sense at first. But God knows what will move us towards knowing, trusting and resonating with him.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

Spend more time listening and reflecting on what God might be calling me to do or join in with other people who are looking to follow Jesus and worship. I want to be better at worshipping and expecting God's presence to be revealed.

Who am I going to share this with?

Others at church who worship. Some of us have tried, on occasion, to write songs together. Maybe we'll try again, or do something else which helps amplify what God wants to produce through us.