



# BIBLE IN A YEAR 2020



## Summary

This book tells the story of God's chosen people, Israel, moving into the land God promised for them. It shows God at work in powerful ways, yet people struggle both with forces opposed to God and with their own faithfulness in relationship with God.

So this book does not describe the completion of people's reconciliation with God, but a milestone on a continuing journey. By the end of the book, it is clear that there is still much to do, and that people are too optimistic about their ability to be faithful, but God has clearly shown his desire and ability to move the earth to bring people back to him.

**Bern Leckie**

## **Friday February 28: Joshua 1-4**

**Massive change is coming – have faith in 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?**

While there is an emotional rollercoaster ride ahead, I love the clarity of where we start with Joshua. He is a God-fearing leader, a lot like Moses, looking to see God's promised kingdom come into being with authority, displacing every authority that opposes God, a bit like Jesus. God acted to bring people close to him and away from evil and corruption. This may be a long time ago in a land far, far away, but these wars should mean a lot to us.

I'm struck by how clearly God is seen to act as his people and kingdom advance. Just like when Israel fled Egypt, God would have to be acknowledged in getting the nation across dry land where there should have been water. It was a sign for everyone, "so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the Lord is powerful..." and part of God preparing his people to have faith in him during dangerous encounters ahead.

I'm also loving the unlikely hero of Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute, Israel's first non-Israelite ally, a model of faith in the New Testament, and did you spot her in Jesus' family tree? (Matthew 1:5) Why is she so special? Despite her background, she believed in God and took risks to act on that belief so God's kingdom would come, and his will would be done.

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

God builds his kingdom by showing people what it means in practice to know, trust and follow him. He calls us out of old life into new. This means massive change. Inevitably, that means battles and difficulties, but God gives us support and every reason to believe in him.

### **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

Is my faith strong enough to cope with massive change? Am I prepared for God's kingdom to move me, physically or in the way I see the world, or for my city to be invaded and transformed by the Holy Spirit? Or am I just hoping for God to give me more of what I already like and find comfortable?

I feel I should reflect on this. What does God want to bring in, like more love shown in practical ways, or get rid of, like anything which is getting in the way between us and him? And am I ready to let go of my pre-judgements about who his kingdom is for and whose faith is going to get remembered and celebrated? I want to pray that I'll meet people whose response to Jesus is surprising and based on what they see God do rather than what I say.

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

I want to pray with more people about our community, especially our school, and see what God shows us about his coming kingdom there.

## **Monday March 2: Joshua 5-8**

### **God can be seen to act when we obey him together**

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 how clearly God is at work in partnership with his people here. The process God gives people to follow before the walls of Jericho collapse sounds much more like a religious ritual than a strategically planned attack. I wonder how the army felt when they were doing their daily quiet, ceremonial march around the city – were they being useful? They knew they were obeying simple instructions from God, but was their faith building that God would act?

I wonder how much jeering and abuse they picked up from Jericho's watchmen at the city walls. Why walk and not fight? Were they any good at being soldiers? They must have looked all kinds of weird. Even if the people of Jericho were afraid of the Lord, did they get a little comfort every day they saw his army seem to leave them alone?

I love that God breaks the apparent deadlock on the seventh day with seven priests and seven trumpets. This has the divine stamp of God's special number on his holy day all over it. No-one thought the wall fell by accident. The people who obeyed, anticipated and waited for God were all ready to give him credit when they saw him act.

Contrast that with people's despair when Achan's disobedience leads to widespread loss and death. Is it fair that people suffer for something which is not their fault? God is treating Israel as a body which shares responsibility. If there is blessing, it is everyone's blessing, and if there is a problem, it is everyone's problem. This isn't always how we see things today. From my individualist viewpoint, it seems unfair, but I can see how God's way of treating his people helped to bring a nation together to reflect his glory and deploy his power.

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

God wants to be known so that people can partner with him and share in the good things that happen as his kingdom is established. When people listen and obey, God can be seen to act, sometimes in ways which seem to make no sense humanly. God also knows that we don't always obey as our motives are mixed. So he gave standing instructions for people's discipline and renewal through religious laws until we could discover new life in Jesus.

### **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

I need to review where I get my sense of what God wants and how obedient I am. Sometimes I think I'm not as content as I should be to follow God's instructions to wait. I want God to be recognised as he works in me, so I should be more willing to take the faith risk of waiting and not acting in my own strength when he seems to call for this.

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

I will pray more with some of the people I've been talking with about projects and action.

## **Tuesday March 3: Joshua 9-12**

### **God at work in tricky situations**

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?**

Hello and welcome to today's episode of "Difficult Bible passages to share with friends who don't believe in God." Most of it sounds nuts, the rest sounds violent and I'm struggling to find any of it which sounds like a life I want to live.

I'm wondering if the UK needs to pick up some tricks from Gibeon for future EU trade negotiations, though. These guys were geniuses! We come from a long way away – look at our old clothes and mouldy bread, we are definitely not your local competitors!

If Israel had consulted God, they would have seen right through this, but the point is that they did not. Despite that, I love how they were so certain of the responsibility they had after making a promise that they would not renege on their deal. God expects to be glorified through faithfulness in our relationships and obedience to his principles, maybe more than any other way, including miraculous signs.

And there were incredible miracles in the sun standing still and the hail killing more of Israel's enemies than their swords. Hooray for... what was this for? There was a lot of death.

This is where I feel tempted to be like Jonah (we looked at him last Thursday) and judge God for myself. How could the God of love have led his people like this? I only have limited understanding and answers here. I trust scholars' interpretation that this book is written with a certain amount of exaggeration to make a point. The Bible itself shows that not all of these "completely destroyed" people were killed, as they show up in later stories. But we are looking at an exceptional moment when God moved, and it is his world after all.

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

God wants the world to be better and calls us to trust and consult him as battles come up over who has authority. He values relationships and faithfulness above all, expecting us to keep our promises. God wants people to have the best quality life, and only he knows how he reckons with the dead – it's not for us to judge. But it is for us to recognise God's authority and ownership of creation, and trust him to redeem impossible looking situations.

### **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

This passage is awesome in some ways, but also reminds me of how little I really have my head around God's plans and purposes sometimes. I don't want to resolve to try and work out something beyond understanding, but I do want to trust God more to answer prayers. I want to pray for more love, though I know his answer often comes through tricky situations.

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

People I pray with when we consider what God wants from us, e.g. at "The SHAPE of you".

## **Thursday March 5: Joshua 13-16**

### **What has God been building?**

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?**

After the incredible forward bursts of God's kingdom in the last few chapters of Joshua, today's reading felt more like a quiet stock take, with a not-too-exciting geography lesson thrown in. So I thought about the scale of what God had done in settling his people, and why that is so important for us as we look for God's kingdom to come fully into our world.

God's kingdom building plan was huge, deliberately bigger than one person or even one generation could handle. We are meant to marvel at the scale of what Joshua had seen in his lifetime, not just because it was a big area, but a difficult one to control. It had tough terrain from deserts to mountains and caves (in some ways like Afghanistan, which brings superpowers to despair even today), neighbours and potential enemies on every side, and much valuable, productive land worth fighting over. God was not leading his people into a quiet and dull settlement, but something valuable and exciting with infinite potential for trouble if they stopped relying on him.

Others have built empires which did not last. God's plan was not just to establish a country for a time, but to reclaim the world and good relationships with people who wanted to follow him forever. I love the details and blessings which were worked out around people like Caleb - he was fit, and God promised him a mountain for his faithfulness! His descendants would need good relationships with neighbours if they were going to eat. Meanwhile, the Levites would need to trust God and his system of worship and sacrifice completely, because they were given the Lord rather than land as their inheritance.

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

God showed the world what life under his authority would be like, not by building the biggest empire but by establishing a society which totally depended on good relationships. This was to remain distinctive from neighbours rather than compromising with their different values, but it was ultimately to reflect God's values of love and faithfulness.

### **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

Reflect on the roles I have, and the amazing resources God has already supplied to get on with them in good relationships with others. Repent where I try to be too independent or fail to believe that God will supply everything needed to get his work done.

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

People I work with, especially where we recognise that we are working to glorify God, but also with some colleagues who don't yet believe in God but do enjoy success and the benefits of working with people who do!

## **Friday March 6: Joshua 17-20**

### **God made some cities special**

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?**

Cities of refuge really grabbed my attention. Among all the details of how God's promised land of interdependent families would look, this seemed by far the most interesting!

I've tried to imagine what life would have been like there. Every incoming refugee would have a pretty intense story to share, regretting their own actions, mourning the loss of someone they may have loved, while needing to uproot from their home for fear of being killed themselves. They would have lost so much of their sense of selves. How would they get on in a radically different place, in a city where others faced the same challenges?

Would there have been a noticeably different atmosphere in their local Starbucks/equivalent? Would any gathering of people have seemed normal to an outsider or fresh arrival? How would people have got on? Or would they mainly have kept to themselves? In a society so dependent on good relationships, how would someone who had to flee there and find a way to make a living get by, let alone lead a fulfilling life?

Movie ideas welcome. (Really, aren't there any movies about this already?) It strikes me as amazing that God's kingdom planning extended to rescuing and redeeming people in extremely difficult situations like this. And it also amazes me that we live in a kind of sanctuary city ourselves, not for people who have necessarily done anything wrong, but whose lives and families had to be uprooted for fear of death at home.

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

God is relational, and his kingdom provision extends to people who have been displaced from their normal relationships. The practical side of this was a reminder of how "the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it" (Psalm 24) and that his kingdom must reflect his values. I'm reminded of Psalm 68:6 – "God sets the lonely in families..."

### **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

I feel privileged to live in a city which is a sanctuary for refugees. Some of the families we know in our school community have extremely hard working and capable kids who have learned at least two languages by age 5. I want to get to know some of the families a lot better than we do now. Faith conversations would be nice too, but I mainly want to share how much hope I have for them, put it into practice as a governor, and explore deeper if they become interested in the reasons for that hope.

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

Others at our school who are looking out for the needs of refugee and other immigrant families, and especially those who might want to join in prayer for them.

## **Monday March 9: Joshua 21-24**

**Do you want to serve the Lord?**

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 that after hearing masses of stuff about God's provision for them, keeping all his promises, God's people got another chance to review their covenant commitment to him.

Joshua makes it clear that these people are not deciding on a sudden opportunity like an impulse purchase. They are not being asked to sign up to a consumer agreement for divine supplies which have more features and benefits than other contracts available.

Rather they are already part of a long-running line of God's people. They were born into the family. And yet, with all the love in the world, they still have a choice. Do they want this?

Was Joshua speaking prophetically, a cynic, or written up later with the benefit of hindsight? In any case, he knew that Israel could not keep its covenant. "You are not able to serve the Lord. He is a holy God," he said. God certainly knew this too, and yet this is what it was all for – to draw his people closer, invite them to join him in kingdom building.

They would seem to fail. Israel would split and be exiled, its riches carried off by neighbouring kings with foreign gods. But not before God was glorified through many people of faith and the family line continued as far as Jesus, the saviour they needed.

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

God is faithful and does lots for his people. He needs us to remember this - not just the idea of it, but specific things he has done. He knew that we would need a reminder of the big hope he has called us to, that we can live with him as Lord, even though it looks unlikely that we can accept this without help.

Thankfully, he has also given us more than the law and stories of people's past faithfulness to help. With Jesus and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, we can know what it is to have fullness of life in his kingdom, even in an imperfect world which needs to be reclaimed. This passage reminds me of how much we need that, otherwise our best intentions and promises aren't going to stand up on their own.

### **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

I am thankful for how much God has done for me by grace, just as Joshua reminded Israel about "a land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build..." I want to increase my awareness of his grace, so that I don't confuse it with what I think I've achieved myself, and echo Joshua's promise that "as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

My family as we build our sense together of what God has done for us and through us.