



BIBLE IN A YEAR 2020



Summary

This book covers a huge number of practical and ceremonial laws given by God to Moses for the people of Israel. They are part of a blueprint for a nation to show what life in God's presence should be like in order to live in a way consistent with God's character.

This is a challenging read on lots of levels. It is technical, without much of the story which made Genesis and Exodus more relatable. Some of the events and many of the laws described can sound hard for us to make sense of.

But it's worth remembering that the patterns laid down for people to follow here helped to form a distinctive nation centred on God. They would also point to the need for a perfect way to a perfect God, later delivered as promised in Jesus.

Bern Leckie

Thursday February 13: Leviticus 1-4

Take a deep breath and smell what's cooking...

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 must admit that I always need to take a deep breath before starting this book (even if I'm not reading it out loud...) There is a ton of exacting detail, almost immeasurable fuss, it seems. These passages sum up what most people I know who don't like God would point to when they distance themselves from religion. Haven't we moved on from this?

At this point, I need to remember that it's not my job to judge God! There is going to be a lot in this book that I'm glad I don't have to do (and we'll see Paul spell this out to Christian in his letter to the Galatians soon.) And yet I find myself wondering why God laid out all these instructions when he knew that people would break them and could not use them to earn their way into his favour in any case.

What I love about these passages is imagining how amazing it would be in the middle of all this food offering. Can you feel the heat and smell the goodness? Can you picture the amount of love and care that had to go into getting this ready? Can you sense how this isn't just people trying to obey God, but God bonding people together with him and each other around involving, meaningful stuff? It's not just people at work here – God is at work with them, shaping them with shared experiences, clear answers to questions about what he might want them do, and a chance to see how wrong can turn to right in life.

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

God wants people to know him, work and find purpose with him and, when things go wrong, know the way back to him. He knows that when we don't feel his presence, we can easily doubt and wander away, so he set out a plan to engage people's senses fully in the celebration of God's fullness of power and love.

Some of the plan would not be fulfilled until Jesus became the perfect priest with the perfect sacrifice for us, but this is where God started to lay the pattern that points to him.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

I am grateful that we have simpler symbols which remind us of Jesus' sacrifice for us in communion. Next time we share this, I am going to take a bit more time to imagine the scene of the sacrifices described here. It's a big deal to be brought together by God to be close to him with our wrongdoing forgiven.

Who am I going to share this with?

I love when we share communion as a whole family, which I hope we'll do soon at church. I want to chat with our son about how amazing it is to be known, loved and forgiven by God.

Friday February 14: Leviticus 5-7

Life fully connected 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?

Sometimes I find myself separating my "faith" life from the rest of my life. As if I could meaningfully do that! It's one thing to separate church time from work time, but it should feel harder than it does to find anything feeling unconnected with such a root belief that God is real, knows and loves us, all day every day.

What I like here is that, for his people, God was working to connect everything in their lives with the patterns of connection with him that he was establishing through gatherings and sacrifices. God was not to be a weekend hobby for his people, but a whole-of-life belief put into practice.

The number of explicit links between worship offerings and everyday behaviour like making or breaking promises seems onerous to me. But I find myself awestruck by the expectations these must have raised about God's concern for our whole lives, not just religious stuff.

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

God made his concern to connect with people visible through an elaborate system of rules and rituals. He later sent Jesus so that, by following him, we could connect fully without all of these things in place, almost as if they were training wheels, but now we don't need them.

So faith in Jesus is meant to be far more than a belief which brings us to church. God does not want us to be hobbyist believers, separating our faith life from the rest of life. Instead, he can give us transformed lives with guilt and sin fully dealt with.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

How can I ever forget that God wants me to connect the whole of my life with him? Over the next few days, I will pay more attention to the times when I may have disconnected, perhaps because I'm doing something wrong, or just being thoughtless about God's love and its potential to change my life.

Who am I going to share this with?

We'll be starting a new run of "The SHAPE of you" course next week with a look at God's kingdom and his purposes for us. I hope I'll have something fresh to share about what God has been showing me about the strength and depth of his connection to my life.

Monday February 17: Leviticus 8-11

God is seriously perfectionist

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?

Just when I think I'm getting my head around God's plan here, I'm shocked by the deaths of two of Aaron's sons. (This is maybe more "reaction" than "like".) What happened?

I do like that God provided ways for his people to be close to him. I also like that there are priestly people with special responsibilities for the work God specified which would bring people together with him. I'm struck by how clearly the priests are marked as special in this passage, and that when they carry out their role it results in glory, blessing and joy.

I'm noticing that God's requirement for priests is, essentially, perfection. Even doing something which might have looked holy, by not following the instructions Nadab and Abihu were disqualified. This brought their lives to an end. I can make sense of that in the context of the story and what God is trying to do on a big scale, but it's still shocking.

This is another good time to remind myself that I'm not qualified to be God's judge. I've also got an abundance of evidence that God loves us. So how do we make sense of this?

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

God's holiness is a big deal. Just as light can't be put out by darkness, God's perfection can't be turned off by imperfection. As we've seen God's purpose in drawing people to have their sin and guilt removed by perfect love, his holiness works for our good. But holy people who represent the closest connection to God can only do this when they obey God.

This is why it was so important for Jesus to be obedient to death, even on a cross. He was the first truly perfect priest and perfect pattern for us to follow.

So what about the imperfect priests Nadab and Abihu? We know God made a point with their deaths, but we don't know what God did with them next. There is more to life than what we see.

And what about our imperfections? Is God going to burn us up for messing up? That's the real worry, isn't it? I can take from this story that God has extremely high standards and will perfect his people, but he gave us a priest in Jesus who is perfectly able to take our mess from us today, even while we await a more perfect state of understanding and being.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

Trust in Jesus to keep burning away my imperfections. Sometimes change feels like death.

Who am I going to share this with?

I'm grateful for life because of Jesus, however. It's better than I had before I properly started to know, trust and follow him! I'll look out for ways to share my story about that.

Tuesday February 18: Leviticus 12-14

God wants life and health for 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?

It's clear that God values life and health and provides these for his people. In recognition, God would be honoured with sacrifice for every new life, lambs which foreshadow Jesus, the life God would offer for us.

I like the mixture of practicality and spirituality in the health laws. Some of the health advice looks a bit odd to me, although much looks like common sense with our understanding of germs.

What I love is the spiritual dimension God adds along with his promise of cleansing for those who believe. God requires his people to recognise the reality of sin in their lives and make meaningful offerings for their "atonement" restoration to good relationship with God. A person's ability to afford an offering would be taken into account - God is more interested in us than our stuff - and as a result God could promise health and life to his people which medicine alone could not provide.

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

God loves us and wants us to have good lives in relationship with him.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

As God wants to deal with sin and disease at the same time, it might be implied from the passage that people's sin caused the disease. I don't think this passage says that outright, however - it's more that God wants to deal with our whole selves, not just the disease we think needs fixing.

Next time I'm ill, I want to use the opportunity to bring my whole self to God. I won't blame my cold on sin, but I will use the illness as a reminder that my body needs attention, and remember as I get better that God made me for wellness and health in good relationship with him.

Who am I going to share this with?

Put the right way, it could be an interesting chat with a doctor! I totally respect that part of God's provision to heal us is through the applied skill of doctors. I realise not every doctor shares this view, so I'll have to consider how to share appropriately.

Thursday February 20: Leviticus 15-18

God makes clean living possible

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?

Some of this reading is scary and forbidding. God's guidelines for his people covered their health, worship, diet and sexual appetites. Following this God could never be seen as a hobby or interest, but an all-of-life commitment. Not only that, but God claimed that the behaviour he wanted was not just a choice but an absolute necessity, as the land itself would become defiled and punishable, and would "vomit out" a wrongdoing people.

Something I don't like about these passages - or rather, how people treat them today - is that it's tempting to leap on particular verses which fit our views and skip over the rest. This can lead to blaming other people for everything wrong in the world, or to rejecting God's laws completely and perhaps picking some out to ridicule along the way. Both of these approaches miss the uncomfortable truth that we've all fallen short, but the good news is that even centuries before Jesus, God was pointing to the way back into healthy relationship with him and each other.

So the bit I love most about today's reading is the description of the two goats, one for sacrifice and one for casting out. Was the atonement the original "let go and let God"? Through the symbolic offering, people were shown that confession could release them from guilt, that God's chosen creature could literally take this guilt away, and that priests offering sacrifice for the people could cleanse them. Atonement was not a daily activity, but "once a year for all the sins". It's good, but even then it's only a shadow of the greater reality God has in store through Jesus.

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

It's a consistent message through Leviticus - God's demand for our purity and his offer to cleanse where this is needed, and he knows it is going to be needed.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

I think it would be easiest to ignore any direct application and claim that this law does not apply to me. But God's principles do and always will, as the land which vomited would testify! I need to reflect more on how my surroundings and I are affected by sin, and not take Jesus' work for granted.

Who am I going to share this with?

Where there are things which need to be confessed, I'll do this with people I trust can pray with me and for me.

Friday February 21: Leviticus 19-21

“But why?”

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 mixture of rules really made me feel like a child who has hit an obsession with the words: "But why?"

Don't steal (makes sense), and don't swear... but why? Don't seek revenge (makes sense), and don't wear clothing woven of two kinds of material... but why? Show respect for the elderly (makes sense), and don't eat meat with blood in it, clip off the edge of your beard or get a tattoo... but why?!?

God seems to explain many of these laws, but the frequent refrain "I am the Lord your God" reminds me of my mother's answer to too many "but why"s, which was "because I'm your mother!" This doesn't feel entirely comfortable - but I guess that's my problem.

God is not just a lawmaker here, I think, but a parent to us. Some of his boundaries seem odd and I want to push against them, but I can see that God's intention is that his children develop good hearts which aren't undermined by practical harm or hardened by even symbolic rebellion, and that his people are made holy - set apart for a purpose, clean and useful for good things.

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

Purely as a list of laws, some seem arbitrary and questionable, but I believe that these instructions reveal the heart of a loving father who wants his children to be safe and to develop healthy, respectful relationship with him as well as with brothers and sisters. The fact that the total burden of these laws seems heavy to bear is partly down to my naturally rebellious heart, but with a wider view of what will happen next, I know that God also intended the law to reveal our need to embrace Jesus.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

I would rather have a heart shaped by relationship with Jesus than by a set of instructions, or my reaction to those instructions! This reminds me that it's not enough just to study the Bible, but I need to grow in prayer, building a real relationship in which putting God's word into practice doesn't seem like an unmanageable chore.

Who am I going to share this with?

I'm looking forward to praying more next week with people on "The SHAPE of you" course. We are discovering what God has made us to be, each unique in lots of ways, but all his children. I want to share more with this group about what that means to me.

Monday February 24: Leviticus 22-24

What it means to bring our best in worship

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 used to read this and think God was rather fussy and sensitive about details, but as I've been considering what God has been training his people for through the law, I can see how important worship without compromise is for our future.

I don't think it's the case that God can't stand to look upon anything bent or wobbly. It's more that the quality of what we bring in worship reflects the quality of our hearts for worship and the strength of our desire to put relationship with God into our lives as a top priority. Worship is meant to be special because God wants us to have special relationships with us

What is the best thing I can bring in worship? I'm surprised that the answer seems to be... ourselves. There are festivals to mark important symbolic occasions for God's people, and lots to keep them busy sacrificing, but would God get hungry without some more burnt lamb? No, God seems keen to get people together and ready to offer themselves in worship - like Paul writes in Romans 12, "offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God..." But hang on, what about God's standards and not accepting anything with a defect? I'm thinking this is all pointing to something amazing - that God would accept as perfect those whose faith brings them to worship wholeheartedly.

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

God calls his people to a complete lifestyle of worship, relationship and wholeness in him. As well as wanting personal commitments from us, God also wants us to take part in community celebration, building relationships with him and each other. God wants these things to be great and is not prepared to see us compromise anything with his name on it.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

There are definitely times when I feel I'm going through the motions of worship but my heart isn't in it. I will look to invest more wholeheartedly in worship over the next few days (which isn't just singing in church, but practical service before and after Sunday).

Who am I going to share this with?

People I pray and worship with, and hopefully with someone else outside of church I might get to have conversations with about church and God.

Tuesday February 25: Leviticus 25-27

Do we know the value of anything?

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 middle of this section of many details about the values of things, I'm struck by the single biggest choice God gives his people – obey him as Lord, or not.

I love the rich details in the promise to those who obey. I'm not so much loving the idea of terror for disobedience, but I do notice that God resolves not to give up on people. This section is long, partly because of all the chances people have to return to God. We needed them and, looking back, it seems that God did not forget his covenant promises. He sent a saviour and finished the work this law was designed to start.

I'm also intrigued by the listed values of things and people, however. Do they mean that God values men more than women? I don't think so, any more than God values a field more for producing more years of crops. These are our concerns, not his. I'm going to suggest that God was regulating behaviour here based on human values at the time, not the value that God places on people and things. We are probably still yet to learn the full extent of that.

But we get a clue from the remarkable festival of Jubilee. In one sense, it's a social regulator preventing God's people from taking too much from each other. It is also a reminder of something which can transform the way we value everything – it all, ultimately, comes from and belongs to God. Our trading of stuff looks completely different when we remember it's not our stuff. Our valuations of stuff are then much less important than God's valuation of us. A few coins don't reflect God's value of any of us, male or female, young or old.

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

God knows how obsessed we get over possessions and having to put prices on stuff. He also wants to remind us not to build our lives on the accumulation of things. It seems remarkable to have a system which recognises God's ownership of everything, as it's very different from our economy, but Jesus would continue to challenge people about money and possessions. God cares about how we see these things because he cares about us.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

I fall into the trap of thinking that my value is somehow linked to the value of my stuff. This makes things hard to give away and put to better use sometimes. It's been too long since I've had a proper review of what stuff I'm holding onto when it could be better given away, so I should do this soon.

Who am I going to share this with?

My wife – we have thought about this together before, but it's been a while!