

READ THE BIBLE IN A YEAR – February 2025

This year, we are challenging ourselves to read the Bible over 365 days. Some of us may have read it from Genesis through to Revelation. But have you ever read it chronologically, in the order that events occurred in human history? Have you ever wondered how the story of our human relationship with God unfolded across time as we understand it?

For the month of February, the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers will be explored. Here is a bit more information about each book; including a recap of Exodus from January.

Exodus

This second book of the Pentateuch chronicles the deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt (chapters 1-15). It is in Exodus 2:23-25 that we read of God's awareness of the suffering of the Hebrews and of God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob from the book of Genesis. But it also tells the story of how the Hebrews, under the leadership of Moses, become a distinct people who are to live under a new set of laws (the ten commandments) and who experience the presence of God through the construction of the tabernacle and its sacred artifacts as they journey to the Promised Land (chapters 16-40). It is a narrative about the forging of the identity of Israel as a distinct people of God.

Exodus is a significant book because it also registers several events of theophany; encounters between human beings and God in which God is made manifest in some observable or tangible form. The first is in Exodus 3:1-6 in which Moses alone has an unexpected meeting with God at the site of the burning bush on Mount Sinai; a sacred place. The second event is described in Exodus 19:16-20 when God appears to all of Israel through the presence of heavy smoke, thunder, and a violent earthquake. In Exodus 24:1-11 we have the third theophany as Israel enters into a new covenant with God, symbolized by the sharing of a meal for a small group and a ceremony involving blood as a symbol of life. The fourth encounter is found in Exodus 24:12-18, when Moses again meets God on Mount Sinai, leaving Aaron in charge for *forty days and forty nights*. This is when the ten commandments are given to Moses. Joshua accompanies Moses up the mountain. A cloud then covers the mountain for six days and on the seventh day God calls Moses to come out of the cloud. During this encounter, Moses also receives very detailed instructions from God about the tabernacle and its sacred contents. Although there are some 50 theophanic events chronicled in the Old Testament, there is quite a concentration of these encounters in Exodus as well as in Genesis.

Academics who have studied the book of Exodus have not come to full agreement about its history or its authorship. But they do concur that it is the definitive story of Israel as a people being freed from human slavery to become "slaves" to a with His people, but

also gain insight into what God expects of them and why He expects it. From Exodus, we come to know and understand many of the traditions, festivals, and practices of worship of the Jewish community; many of which continue to today. Those ancient roots also have implications for Christian traditions; many of which were grounded in historical Jewish practices.

The story of Exodus is one of liberation, and we travel with the Israelites as they move geographically from Egypt to the Promised Land, crossing the desert as they moved further away from slavery to Egyptian power to a new life and a new identity as God's people. This physical movement is symbolic of them becoming a distinct people.

Leviticus

Leviticus is the third book of the Torah (or Pentateuch). It focuses on the worship of God in his sanctuary and also gives us insights into topics and issues related to priests and their priestly duties, obligations, and training. The priests were from the tribe of Levi, which explains the title of this book.

We do not know the authors of Leviticus. However, scholars view it as having been produced in two parts: the "Priestly Torah" (believed to have been written before 538 BCE) and the "Holiness Collection" or "Holiness Code", (believed to have been written around the time of the end of the exile in 538 BCE). Roughly divided, chapters 1-16 focus on the "Priestly Torah" and chapters 17-26 focus on the "Holiness Collection" writings. The two parts work to inform each other, giving those who were considering priesthood the wisdom and practical advice they needed as they trained. Additionally, it provided working priests with parameters and practices as they ministered to their communities.

The book appears to have four main parts that follow a logical flow. Chapters 1-7 focus on the business of sacrifice. There is a lot of detail in these chapters which gives us an indication of just how significant sacrifice was to the people of Israel. This section provided priests with practical instruction on sacrifices which were to be made in the sanctuary. It is interesting to note some of the parallels between these ancient rituals around sacrifice and the pattern for the Eucharist as it was given to the disciples at the Last Supper on what we now call Maundy Thursday.

Chapters 8-16 focus on the consecration of priests. The process of consecration (which we would now call ordination) happened over a 7-day period, with the 8th day being the time for a form of closing ceremony. These chapters also give us insights into how the Jewish faith defined the concepts of purity and impurity. Chapters 10 focuses on the sins of Aaron's sons and also give rules for priests and how they are to conduct themselves; including a detailed description of the vestments that they are to wear. Chapter 16 describes the Day of Atonement in which the sanctuary would be purified once a year; usually in the fall season. This tradition typically included a time of fasting for the people.

It is interesting to note that chapters 8 and 11-16 all begin with the phrase, “The Lord spoke to Moses...”. Sometimes the opening phrase is, “The Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron...”. Whichever is the case, we are left with no doubt that the content of this portion of Leviticus was a direct communication from God.

Chapters 17-26 contains five subsections, including: sacrificial law, moral and ethical laws, priestly and sacrificial rules, holy occasions, and blessings and curses. This roughly mirrors the organization of chapters 1-16 which include instruction on sacrifices, priestly duties, and holy occasions.

It can be a challenge to read through and appreciate Leviticus because it is very detailed and very technical. It is also written from the assumption that readers are already familiar with the ritual system of the ancient Jewish faith and overall culture. But it also helps us to understand the religious laws because it provides the reader with “blocks of law”. For example, chapter 8 is about priestly laws, chapters 11 and 12 are about impurity, chapters 16 and 17 focus on laws related to sacrifice, chapter 19 emphasizes ethical laws, chapter 23 centres on laws relevant to festivals, and chapter 25 discusses economic laws. From our 21st century position in history, we can read Leviticus and start to get some insight into how the Jewish faith eventually became so caught up in human interpretation of the laws that people became almost obsessed with the letter of the law, rather than the spirit of the law. It will take Jesus and his ministry to begin to open the Jewish community’s eyes to the point that many of them had almost forgotten God, and that corruption had seeped in and overtaken what had originally been pure and holy as the word of God.

Numbers

As the fourth book of the Torah (or Pentateuch), this book of Numbers provides us with a narrative of the events that occurred as the people of Israel travelled across the desert wilderness after having escaped slavery in Egypt. The book of Exodus finished with the plans for how the tabernacle, the portable tent-like structure for worship, would serve as an important role in the journey ahead. The book of Leviticus acted as a kind of sequel to that, with detailed directions about the role of Levites as priests and about the ceremonies that were to take place in the sanctuary of the tabernacle. The book of Numbers then picks up from there, providing narratives about the people and their relationship to the sanctuary as well as their relationship to the law.

The first section, chapters 1-10, tells of the preparations for travel into the desert wilderness and how the people are to be organized into a series of camps by tribe. This plan involves the encampments of the 12 tribes with the sanctuary in the centre. It also details the census that was to be taken and outlines how it is the Levites that will be consecrated as priests.

The second section, chapters 11-25, is about the actual journey through the wilderness. This portion of Numbers includes stories of Miriam, Aaron, Korah, Dathan, and

Abiram. These episodes describe complaints, rebellion, and God acting to reprimand those who would bring about division and conflict amongst the people of Israel.

The third section, chapters 26-36, is about the end of the journey and the preparations to enter into Canaan as the Promised Land. Again, there is a census taken. As Moses nears the end of his life, Joshua is appointed by God to be the new leader.

February 1	<u>Exodus 7-9</u>	My Insights...
February 2	<u>Exodus 10-12</u>	
February 3	<u>Exodus 13-15</u>	
February 4	<u>Exodus 16-18</u>	
February 5	<u>Exodus 19-21</u>	
February 6	<u>Exodus 22-24</u>	
February 7	<u>Exodus 25-27</u>	
February 8	<u>Exodus 28-29</u>	
February 9	<u>Exodus 30-32</u>	
February 10	<u>Exodus 33-35</u>	
February 11	<u>Exodus 36-38</u>	
February 12	<u>Exodus 39-40</u>	
February 13	<u>Leviticus 1-4</u>	

February 14	<u>Leviticus 5-7</u>	
February 15	<u>Leviticus 5-7</u>	
February 16	<u>Leviticus 11-13</u>	
February 17	<u>Leviticus 14-15</u>	
February 18	<u>Leviticus 16-18</u>	
February 19	<u>Leviticus 19-21</u>	
February 20	<u>Leviticus 22-23</u>	
February 21	<u>Leviticus 24-25</u>	
February 22	<u>Leviticus 26-27</u>	
February 23	<u>Numbers 1-2</u>	
February 24	<u>Numbers 3-4</u>	
February 25	<u>Numbers 5-6</u>	
February 26	<u>Numbers 7</u>	

February 27	<u>Numbers 8-10</u> Numbers 1-1-13	
February 28	<u>Numbers 1-1-13</u>	

