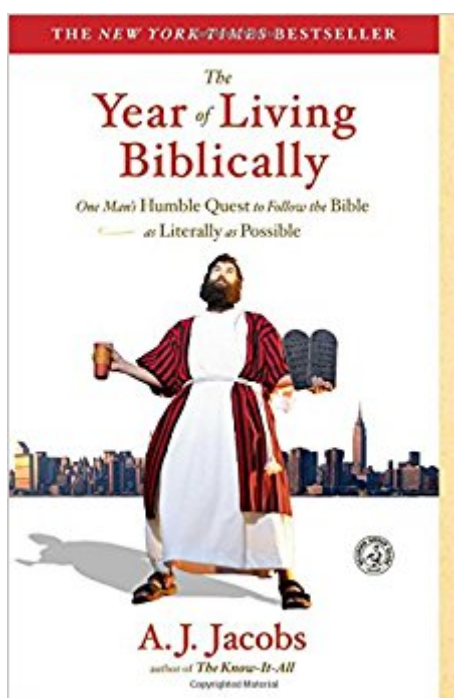


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# The Year Of Living Biblically: One Man's Humble Quest To Follow The Bible As Literally As Possible



## Synopsis

From the bestselling author of *The Know-It-All* comes a fascinating and timely exploration of religion and the Bible. A.J. Jacobs chronicles his hilarious and thoughtful year spent obeying the Bible as literally as possible. Raised in a secular family but increasingly interested in the relevance of faith in our modern world, A.J. Jacobs decides to dive in headfirst and attempt to obey the Bible as literally as possible for one full year. He vows to follow the Ten Commandments. To be fruitful and multiply. To love his neighbor. But also to obey the hundreds of less publicized rules: to avoid wearing clothes made of mixed fibers; to play a ten-string harp; to stone adulterers. The resulting spiritual journey is at once funny and profound, reverent and irreverent, personal and universal and will make you see history with new eyes. Jacobs's quest transforms his life even more radically than the year spent reading the entire *Encyclopedia Britannica* for *The Know-It-All*. His beard grows so unruly that he is regularly mistaken for a member of ZZ Top. He immerses himself in prayer, tends sheep in the Israeli desert, battles idolatry, and tells the absolute truth in all situations—much to his wife's chagrin. Throughout the book, Jacobs also embeds himself in a cross-section of communities that take the Bible literally. He tours a Kentucky-based creationist museum and sings hymns with Pennsylvania Amish. He dances with Hasidic Jews in Brooklyn and does Scripture study with Jehovah's Witnesses. He discovers ancient biblical wisdom of startling relevance. And he wrestles with seemingly archaic rules that baffle the twenty-first-century brain. Jacobs's extraordinary undertaking yields unexpected epiphanies and challenges. A book that will charm readers both secular and religious, *The Year of Living Biblically* is part Cliff Notes to the Bible, part memoir, and part look into worlds unimaginable. Thou shalt not be able to put it down.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Best of the Month, September 2007: Make no mistake: A.J. Jacobs is not a religious man. He describes himself as Jewish "in the same way the Olive Garden is an Italian restaurant." Yet his latest work, *The Year of Living Biblically: One Man's Humble Quest to Follow the Bible as Literally as Possible*, is an insightful and hilarious journey for readers of all faiths. Though no fatted calves were harmed in the making of this book, Jacobs chronicles 12 months living a remarkably strict Biblical life full of charity, chastity, and facial hair as impressive as anything found in *The Lord of the Rings*. Through it all, he manages to brilliantly keep things light, while avoiding the sinful eye of judgment. --Dave Callanan .com

Subtitled: "One Man's Humble Quest to Follow the Bible as Literally as Possible," Jacobs, or A.J., as his two-year-old son calls him, does just that. It is likely that no one but A.J. Jacobs could have accomplished such a feat. After all, his last book, *The Know-It-All*, chronicles his reading of the entire *Encyclopedia Britannica*, from A to Z. No one but a smart, witty, self-deprecating, nitpicky kinda guy would undertake two such daunting tasks, and complete them with grace, no pun intended. Jacobs, a New York Jewish agnostic, decides to follow the laws and rules of the Bible, beginning with the Old Testament, for one year. (He actually adds some bonus days and makes it a 381-day year.) He starts by growing a beard and we are with him through every itchy moment. Jacobs is borderline OCD, at least as he describes himself; obsessing over possible dangers to his son, germs, literal interpretation of Bible verses, etc. He enlists the aid of counselors along the way; Jewish rabbis, Christians of every stripe, friends and neighbors. In an open-minded way he also visits with atheists, Evangelicals Concerned (a gay group), Jerry Falwell, snake handlers, Red Letter Christians--those who adhere to the red letters in the Bible, those words spoken by Jesus Himself, and even takes a trip to Israel and meets Samaritans. Through it all, he keeps a healthy skepticism, but continues to pray and is open to the flowering of real faith. Jacobs is a knowledge junky, to be sure. He enjoys the lore he picks up along the way as much as any other aspect of his experiment. One of the ongoing schticks is his meeting with the shatnez tester, Mr. Berkowitz. He is the one who determines whether or not your clothes are made of mixed fibers, in keeping with the Biblical injunction not to wear wool and linen together. The two become friends and prayer partners, in only one of the unexpected results of this year. In the end, he says, "I'm now a

reverent agnostic. Which isn't an oxymoron, I swear. I now believe that whether or not there's a God, there is such a thing as sacredness. Life is sacred." Not a bad outcome. --Valerie Ryan --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Starred Review. What would it require for a person to live all the commandments of the Bible for an entire year? That is the question that animates this hilarious, quixotic, thought-provoking memoir from Jacobs (*The Know-It-All*). He didn't just keep the Bible's better-known moral laws (being honest, tithing to charity and trying to curb his lust), but also the obscure and unfathomable ones: not mixing wool with linen in his clothing; calling the days of the week by their ordinal numbers to avoid voicing the names of pagan gods; trying his hand at a 10-string harp; growing a ZZ Top beard; eating crickets; and paying the babysitter in cash at the end of each work day. (He considered some rules, such as killing magicians, too legally questionable to uphold.) In his attempts at living the Bible to the letter, Jacobs hits the road in highly entertaining fashion to meet other literalists, including Samaritans in Israel, snake handlers in Appalachia, Amish in Lancaster County, Pa., and biblical creationists in Kentucky. Throughout his journey, Jacobs comes across as a generous and thoughtful (and, yes, slightly neurotic) participant observer, lacing his story with absurdly funny cultural commentary as well as nuanced insights into the impossible task of biblical literalism. (Oct.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

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This book provides a lot of interesting observations on the interpretation of the laws as set out in the Bible and the Old Testament in particular. Perhaps it is most interesting because it is written by a declared agnostic who by trying to live according to the Bible as literally as he could, is affected by what he reads and so changes himself almost unwittingly. I think his conclusion that all who proclaim to be believers of one of the forms of Judo-Christian religious movements, all are selective in what they actually follow, is one of the most interesting. However, he does also try and make sense of and put into practice some of the stranger rules and thereby gives them a certain logic. However, the main problem with the book is the obsessively anal character of the author and his tendency towards paranoia. His upbringing of his first child forms a major part of the book and drove me mad. I felt I wanted to shake him and say, dont be so controlling. I felt enormous pity for his wife, although she seemed to have some coping mechanisms, such as using the word 'Helmet' when he was being obsessively protective with his son. The fact that half my review focuses on the author is a reflection I believe of the weakness of the book and yet also its strength, for it applies the rules to

the author and in so doing exposes the author, who becomes like a character one may feel little sympathy for, but is still vivid, in a novel. In conclusion, I would certainly recommend this book to anyone with a living Judo-Christian faith as it does remind us of the foundations of that faith, while at the same time highlighting the differences in the interpretations of the faith by Orthodox Jews and Christians, with the latter putting much more emphasis on forgiveness and a life beyond the death of the body, while the former provides a stronger set of rules whereby one should live regardless of existence after death.

I'm the ultimate oxymoron - a liberal, practicing Catholic. AJ might classify me as a "cafeteria Catholic," but I've always been comfortable swimming against the stream in the Catholic community. The focus of my faith, like the focus of the Franciscans, has been to serve the poor and attempt to follow the words and example of Christ. I've never been comfortable with those who've warped my religion to fit their own arch-conservative agenda and I refuse to allow them to hijack my faith. I picked up this book expecting a good chuckle, and I got that, but honestly, this book was so well researched that it taught me more about my own faith, and the Bible, that I ever learned in my eight years of CCD and my 46 years of practicing Catholicism. I'm a godmother and a "sponsor" to other Catholics and honestly, this book deepened my faith and allowed me to recommit to my values. It allowed me to slow down and process historical parts of Christianity, and religious views that I'd never considered. I loved the part about the snake handler - this is a guy I'll never meet and I realized that I had my own negative opinions about folks like him. To hear AJ tell it, it seems like we can all learn a lot from this fellow - his tolerance for mankind and his acceptance of those different from him is admirable. Lastly, I want to say that Julie should be considered for sainthood. I can't imagine living with the eccentricities that she put up with - I love her sense of humor ("helmet") and am amazed at her patience. She's a gem and keeper.

Jacobs uses his wit to detail his experiment of following the Bible as literally as possible (as the subtitle suggests) and manages to reconnect to his Jewish roots. Throughout his attempts, Jacobs adamantly avoids succumbing to religiosity. His skepticism keeps him disconnected for the majority of his project, yet it provides secure groundwork for the reader to also maintain an objective perspective while diving into the account. Moreover, Jacobs even goes as far as creating an alter ego, Jacob, who embraces Judaism and scolds A.J. when he strays from the path the Bible has laid out for him/them. Overall, Jacobs predominantly focuses on the Old Testament, but he also spends a few months observing New Testament conditions. I was somewhat disappointed with his

perspective concerning the New Testament and felt he did not give Christians a fair shake. Nevertheless, I walked away from Jacobs' story satisfied that he dove into multiple sects of Judaism and Christianity having learned that pieces of the Bible will most certainly be ignored or practiced fervently. His point was that individuals could not follow the entire Bible as thoroughly as they please since it is simply too vast a task; however, the fact that individuals choose to practice the wisdom the Bible provides is admirable. In general, Jacobs' account is humorous and light-hearted. In many cases, he reminded me that if one is going to study the Bible, it is best to go about the process with a group of people so as to better understand the scriptures. Multiple times, I discovered I have been interpreting the Bible incorrectly and as though I'd never even hear of Judaism or Christianity before. As a result, Jacobs' book encouraged me to seek assistance and truly reflect on passages I read from the Bible. I thoroughly encourage people of any belief to read Jacobs' account as it is a laugh-out-loud reporting of one man's mission to take seriously the scriptures of his ancestors.

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