

SEPTEMBER 2018

CELEBRATING
30 *Years*

TODAY IN THE WORD™



*In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.*

Isaiah 40:3

SPIRITUAL GEOGRAPHY: Mountains and Valleys in Scripture

A devotional from



MOODY
BIBLE INSTITUTE™

TODAY WITH GREG THORNTON

Interim President of Moody Bible Institute

On the Journey



Colorado has 58 mountain peaks that measure more than 14,000 feet high, often known as “14ers.” During a family reunion

in 2005, the more adventurous in our group climbed one of the easier 14ers, Quandary Peak. If you’ve ever attempted such a feat, you know that climbing to that elevation takes considerable effort. As you ascend, the air becomes thinner, and your body reacts to the changing altitude. But the views from the top were astounding (as were the increasingly forceful winds!). Valleys have their own type of beauty. The most memorable one that I have seen is Dead Sea Valley in Israel.

Mountains and valleys appear frequently in Scripture, perhaps because they so accurately depict the dynamics of our faith journey. Most of us have had mountaintop experiences where God seems especially near, and we are overwhelmed by His goodness and glory. But there are also those valleys, when we feel vulnerable, shaken, even utterly alone.

Psalm 121 is labeled a Song of Ascent, also referred to as the Pilgrim Song. I love how it focuses not on the

mountaintop experience but on the journey itself:

I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither sleep nor slumber.

The LORD watches over you—the LORD is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD will keep you from harm—he will watch over your life; the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.

Are you on the mountaintop today, celebrating what God has done in your life? Or are you in the valley, struggling to see and understand? God is present. He is protecting you, ensuring that your foot holds firmly on a crevice. He shields you from the heat of the blazing sun and the icy sting of winter. He is forever vigilant from the moment you were born until your last dying breath. He is your constant through it all.

We can rejoice that God is with us—not just at our destination but on every step along the way. ■

THEOLOGY MATTERS

by Dr. John Koessler

The One Who Fills Heaven and Earth

God created the physical universe, and He also inhabits it. In Jeremiah 23:24, the Lord characterizes Himself as one who fills heaven and earth. This spatial language shows that no place in all creation exists from which God is excluded. He is always present everywhere. The theological term for this divine attribute is *omnipresence*.

According to theologian Herman Bavinck, omnipresence is God's infinity applied to space. The psalmist wrote of God's omnipresence: "If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast" (Ps. 139:8–10).

The doctrine of divine omnipresence is not the same as pantheism. Omnipresence teaches that God fills all of creation. Pantheism asserts that all creation *is* God or divine. Scripture teaches that God is distinct from His creation. He made it and is separate from it. Creation is dependent upon God and is supported by His power (Col. 1:16–17). God, on the other hand, does not depend upon creation for anything. He "is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he

himself gives all men life and breath and everything else" (Acts 17:25).

Omnipresence is also unlike the god portrayed in Deism, a divine presence who sets creation in motion and then steps away from it. Although God is separate from creation, He is engaged with and acts within it.

God's presence is a reality in the physical world, but it should not be understood in a physical sense. He is not diffused in the atmosphere like a gas. God is not contained by what He has created. God does not fill creation the way water fills a glass or air fills the atmosphere. The fact that God is equally present in every location does not mean that He manifests His presence the same way everywhere. He has made His presence known in a variety of ways and to varying degrees.

Divine omnipresence means no place or circumstance is beyond the scope of God's presence. Wherever we may go, God is already there before us. ■

FOR FURTHER STUDY

To learn more, read *God and the Cosmos: Divine Activity in Space, Time and History* by Harry Lee Poe and Jimmy H. Davis (InterVarsity).

FROM THE EDITORS

by Jamie Janosz

We love hearing from you!

What an encouragement it is to read your letters and emails to *Today in the Word*. We pray that this devotional will encourage you to read and reflect on Scripture and that God will use the time in His Word to guide your life. Thank you also for giving generously to support this ministry. Because of your help, we can encourage thousands of readers to stay rooted in God's Word.

Here are a few letters from our mailbox:

I love Today in the Word. I try my best to read it every day, and when I miss I double up to be sure I get the full impact and benefit. This is a very effective Bible study and personal, godly, enriching tool. Thank you so much to everyone responsible for this content and insight. It is so helpful! God bless you all!

—Brian in Manchester, Conn.

Today in the Word is the first thing I do in the morning when I begin my Bible study. It always sets me off on the right foot for the rest of my day.

—Linda in Chatsworth, Ga.

I am not sure of the date I started reading Today in the Word with my Bible in the morning, but it should be no surprise to all of you and hopefully a great encouragement that God has used it to teach, to train, to correct, and to sometimes rebuke me in my Christian

life every single day since sometime in 1989. There are so many stories I could write a book, and maybe someday I will, but for now, be blessed all of you who have a hand and a heart in producing Today in the Word. I love you guys and am privileged to be part of your family. We're gonna have a great time in glory!

—Rick in Medina, Ohio

I try to read a devotion every day. This helps me to read the Bible every day. As it says, all Scripture is profitable.

—Joseph in Highland Park, Ill.

Today in the Word is a great devotional. I've learned so much about people and history throughout the Bible. The Bible passages are so meaningful. I have decided to get it daily online. Saves postage!—Sarah in Santa Ana, Calif.

Thank you for Today in the Word. It is always good, always filling.

"Forgiveness—A Gift to Give & to Receive" was an excellent devotion/study. Yes, we desperately need forgiveness. We have so much to be thankful for—so blessed! May God use us to be that sweet fragrance of Jesus' forgiveness to others.

—Lindy in Lakeland, Fla.

Has God used *Today in the Word* in your life? If so, drop us a note and tell us! ■

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TODAY IN THE WORD™

Spiritual Geography: Mountains and Valleys in Scripture

“Life’s a bit like mountaineering—never look down.”

These words belong to Edmund Hillary, a New Zealand mountaineer, Antarctic explorer, and philanthropist—an authority on mountain climbing. Hillary and the Tibetan mountaineer Tenzing Norgay were the first climbers confirmed to have reached the summit of Mount Everest. In our study with *Today in the Word* this month, we’ll see that Hillary’s words apply to our spiritual walk as well.

As we study physical and spiritual geography in the Bible this month, we’ll explore three main themes: we’ll climb the mountains and traverse valleys where people had life-changing encounters with God; we’ll examine how the geography of the land of Israel is reflected in the journey of faith of the people of Israel; and finally, we’ll look into the various landscape images in scriptural prophecy. We’ll praise God for being the Lord of our mountaintop experiences, as well as our Good Shepherd in the dark valleys of despair.

Thank you for joining us on the journey through the biblical terrain this month! Our prayer is that this study will encourage you to look up to the Lord no matter the season or type of landscape you’re going through. We hope that when you’re desperate for help, you’ll agree with the psalmist: “My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth” (Psalm 121:2). ■

—Elena Mafter, Senior Editor

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SATURDAY
SEPTEMBER

1

Whoever does these things will never be shaken.

Psalm 15:5

“Who May Live on Your Holy Mountain?”

Pastor and theologian John Stott wrote that we humans “are both breath of God and dust of earth, godlike and bestial, created and fallen, noble and ignoble. That seems to be why we both seek God and run away from him, both practise righteousness and suppress the truth in our unrighteousness, both recognize the claims of the moral law upon us and refuse to submit to it, both erect altars in God’s honour and need to repent of our ignorance and sin.”

Given these contradictions, David wondered who among us is worthy to dwell with God. “Lord, who may dwell in your sacred tent? Who may live on your holy mountain?” (v. 1). “Sacred tent” refers to the tabernacle, while “holy mountain” refers to the hill in Jerusalem on which the temple would be built.

Our devotional study topic this month is mountains and valleys in the Bible. We’ll study passages involving both literal

and figurative mountains and valleys, focusing on what happens in these places and what they come to symbolize as a result. For the next few days, we’ll examine mountains in Scripture as special places to meet God.

One version translates the opening question in Psalm 15: “Who may be a guest in your home?” This frames the issue in terms of hospitality, which is not a one-time event but rather an ongoing relationship. We could paraphrase the meaning as, “Who will be permitted to stay with God on a long-term basis?”

The psalm answers: A person worthy to dwell with God is righteous (v. 2). They speak truth and act with sincerity or genuineness. Their words are pure (v. 3). They fear the Lord, hate sin, and love their neighbor (v. 4). They keep their promises and act with integrity. They show compassion and work for justice for the poor and powerless (v. 5).

APPLY THE WORD

Becoming the kind of person who can dwell with God should be a top spiritual priority. Not that we can do it on our own—far from it! We need the Spirit’s transforming power as we grow in Christlikeness (2 Cor. 3:18). This should be our heart’s constant longing: “Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere” (Ps. 84:10).

PRAY WITH US

Dr. Timothy Arens, dean of Student Life, and his team provide our students with programs, information, and services for the efficient and effective learning process at Moody. Please uphold their ministry in prayer.

*Take off your sandals, for the place
where you are standing is holy ground.*

Exodus 3:5

SUNDAY
SEPTEMBER

2

Moses and the Burning Bush

In the opening passage of her book *Dakota*, writer Kathleen Norris described its “spiritual geography”: “The high plains, the beginning of the desert West, often act as a crucible for those who inhabit them. Like Jacob’s angel, the region requires that you wrestle with it before it bestows a blessing. . . . Nature, in Dakota, can indeed be an experience of the holy.”

In all stories, whether historical or fictional, setting matters—and thus geography matters. It should be no surprise that creation evokes the Creator. As we consider mountains and valleys in Scripture this month, we will often find that mountains are special places to meet God.

In today’s narrative, Moses neither anticipated nor desired an encounter with the Lord. Having fled from Egypt, he was living a quiet shepherd’s life in Midian with his wife and family. But God

had heard His people’s cries for help, and had chosen Moses as the man who would deliver them from slavery. So He initiated this meeting on Mount Horeb, which is another name for Mount Sinai.

The meeting had three key aspects. First, Moses needed to show respect and reverence for God’s holiness, demonstrated by taking off his sandals (v. 5). Second, God identified Himself to Moses as the God of his ancestors, a reminder of His covenant-keeping nature (v. 6; Ex. 2:24). And third, God commissioned Moses to deliver the Israelites from their bondage (vv. 7–10). When Moses resisted, God promised, “I will be with you,” and added that the people would one day worship Him at this very mountain (v. 12).

The next time he stood on Mount Horeb, Moses would be a transformed man. As it always does, meeting God launched him on an incredible journey!

APPLY THE WORD

Moses’ ability to accomplish his task did not depend on his own strengths or abilities. That’s why God did not respond to Moses’ doubts with a pep talk or a self-esteem boost. He promised His presence, which is more than enough to get the job done. The same is true for us! Whatever God has called you to do, the key is His faithful presence.

PRAY WITH US

Would you support in prayer Janet Mitchell and Paulette Phillips in Student Accounts? We appreciate their faithful service at Moody Bible Institute, as they help our students to have their financial records in order.

MONDAY
SEPTEMBER

3

*Moses led the people out
of the camp to meet with God.*

Exodus 19:17

Promise Kept at Mount Sinai

Mount Rushmore in South Dakota has been called the “Shrine of Democracy.” The heads of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln were carved out of the mountain in 1941 and restored for the 50th anniversary in 1991. It currently welcomes nearly three million visitors per year.

Mount Rushmore is an iconic mountain in American culture. Similarly, Mount Sinai is iconic in Israelite history. In the interval between Exodus 3 and Exodus 19, much had happened, including confrontations with Pharaoh, the ten plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, and liberation from four centuries of slavery. Through it all, God had remained faithful. He had promised Moses, “When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain” (3:12). Now they had arrived! The occasion was important enough to record the “very day” (v. 1).

The Lord’s faithfulness extended back not only to the burning bush but to the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. His message had two parts. First, acknowledge the past. He had rescued them from bondage. He had “carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself” (v. 4). Second, commit to the future (vv. 5–6). In the context of their close relationship with God and identity as His “treasured possession” and “holy nation,” they needed to take seriously their covenant responsibilities of obedience and worship (vv. 5–6).

The *Moody Bible Commentary* points out that Mount Sinai was not a beautiful tourist destination. It was “a place where there were no distractions, no other associations, and nothing of the world. There was really nothing here but the Lord Himself. All other associations were set aside so that the people could focus on the covenant, the relationship about to be established.”

APPLY THE WORD

Mount Sinai was a place without distractions. Do you have a place like that? A place where no one (and no electronic notifications!) will interrupt? A place where God has your full and undivided attention? If yes, give thanks! If not, consider where you might find your own mountainous wilderness to meet with God.

PRAY WITH US

Please uphold in prayer one more team of talented people who help our students adjust to and benefit from their time at Moody. Ask the Father to bless the service of Joe Gonzales, Edward Jones, and Rebekah Kiesling in Student Programs.

Everything the LORD has said we will do.

Exodus 24:3

TUESDAY
SEPTEMBER

4

Covenant Affirmed at Mount Sinai

Formal ceremonies include rituals or practices that convey the seriousness of the occasion. Closing on a home requires signatures on legal documents. Testifying in court means swearing on a Bible to tell “the whole truth and nothing but the truth.” Getting married entails vows before witnesses. In that example, seriousness is mixed with joy and celebration, especially at the reception following the ceremony.

The ceremony affirming the covenant at Mount Sinai was of this sort, involving both solemnity and celebration. Just as meeting God on the mountain had been transformative for Moses, so meeting Him on the mountain was now spiritually transformative for Israel as a nation.

During the special event narrated in today’s reading, the people promised, “We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey” (v. 7). Twelve pillars

were set up, one for each of the twelve tribes. Sacrifices were offered, the blood of the covenant between God and the people (v. 8). The Book of the Covenant was read aloud. And the leaders were invited to a solemn, celebratory feast in honor of this momentous occasion. Moses was God’s primary messenger, but a second layer of leadership included the priests, 70 elders, and perhaps Joshua (vv. 1–2, 13).

The feast included eating and drinking, of course, as well as an amazing vision of God. He allowed them to see Him in a limited or indirect way, through a “pavement made of lapis lazuli, as bright blue as the sky” (v. 10) They might have expected to die for the privilege, but “God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank” (v. 11). The covenant was thereby fully ratified, for sharing a meal indicated that its parties were at peace and in close fellowship.

APPLY THE WORD

Eating and drinking together can be an act of both hospitality and worship (see Neh. 8:1–12). After all, according to 1 Corinthians 10:31, “Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” Plan such an occasion soon! It might be a family dinner, a church potluck, a holiday meal, or a picnic in the park.

PRAY WITH US

As a member of the leadership team, interim president Greg Thornton demonstrates true Christian service with his commitment to integrity and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. Ask the Lord for His guidance in Greg’s service at Moody.

WEDNESDAY
SEPTEMBER

5

Aaron will be gathered to his people.

Numbers 20:24

Aaron's Death on Mount Hor

The English language includes many idiomatic expressions for death and dying. We might say someone “kicked the bucket” or is “pushing up daisies.” More respectful expressions include “passed on” or “departed this life.” Christians might say a fellow believer has been “promoted to glory.” And it’s certainly accurate to say that someone has “gone to meet their Maker.”

A common expression in the Pentateuch for death and dying is found in today’s reading: Aaron was to be “gathered to his people” (vv. 24, 26). This idiom functioned as a reminder of previous generations from which Aaron had descended and with whom death would reunite him. There was also a literal dimension; in the Ancient Near East, family members were often put in the same tombs. Finally, in context this expression served as an encouraging reminder of God’s faithfulness, in that an individual’s life and death are seen

as part of a larger story ultimately orchestrated by the Lord.

Aaron had been involved in Moses’ sin at Meribah, when they had not honored God before the people. Moses disobeyed His instructions to speak to the rock, striking it instead to obtain water. God said that as a result neither would be permitted to enter the Promised Land (vv. 12, 24). Given this punishment, the notice concerning the time and location of Aaron’s death may have been welcomed. Mount Hor was “near the border of Edom” (v. 23), a nation that the Israelites had walked around earlier in the chapter.

God had a purpose for even this sad occasion. An orderly, divinely approved transition in priestly leadership from Aaron to his son Eleazar was needed (vv. 25–28). This was the final way in which Aaron could serve his people. His journey on Earth was complete.

APPLY THE WORD

Advance notice of death gave Aaron extra time to prepare his heart and soul. Most of us don’t have the privilege of such information, but making material and spiritual preparations for death remains important. This includes everything from preparing a will to keeping short accounts with God by confessing sins daily. How prepared are you?

PRAY WITH US

Moody Bible Institute’s undergraduate faculty teach our students the truth of God’s Word and train them for lifelong ministry. Thank you for praying today for our professors!

*I have let you see it with your eyes,
but you will not cross over into it.*

Deuteronomy 34:4

THURSDAY
SEPTEMBER

6

Moses' Death on Mount Nebo

Speaking in Memphis, Tenn., on April 3, 1968, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. said: "I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop. . . . I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land!" Less than 24 hours later, he was killed by an assassin's bullet.

King was alluding, of course, to the biblical story of the death of Moses. Although Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land, God gave him the privilege of seeing it from the top of Mount Nebo (vv. 1–4). This mountain was located in Moab, across the border from Jericho. It might

have been possible naturally to see all that is described here on a clear day, or perhaps God gave Moses a supernaturally enhanced vision. In any case, surely he was encouraged by this gift of God.

God Himself buried His servant, perhaps to avoid the risk that the Israelites would turn Moses' grave into some kind of shrine (v. 6). The leadership transition to Joshua had already been taken care of (v. 9).

An anonymous writer, probably after the Exile, concluded that from that day until now, "No prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face" (vv. 10–12). Like all the prophets, he looked forward to One greater: "Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself" (Heb. 3:1–6).

APPLY THE WORD

What do you want people to say about you after you're gone? What do you hope they say about your work for the Lord and your relationship with Him? If you're not sure, make this a topic for prayer soon. If you have a basic idea, are your current priorities and choices taking you in the right directions? If not, what might need to change?

PRAY WITH US

Will you lift up in prayer Moody's trustees today? Ask the Lord for the Holy Spirit's leading and for wisdom in making decisions for the future of the Institute. Please refer to the beginning of this issue for the list of the trustees' names.

*Go out and stand on the mountain
in the presence of the LORD.*

1 Kings 19:11

The Voice of the Lord on Mount Horeb

Patrick, the fifth-century missionary to Ireland, desired above all to spread the gospel: “Daily I expect murder, fraud or captivity, but I fear none of these things because of the promises of heaven. . . . I must take this decision disregarding risks involved and make known the gifts of God and his everlasting consolation.” Legend has it that at the top of Eagle Mountain, now called Croagh Patrick, he rang a church bell that drove the snakes (or perhaps demons) out of Ireland.

On the top of Mount Horeb (another name for Mount Sinai), Elijah heard the voice of God—but it was not what he expected. Elijah hadn’t ended up there by chance. He knew the history. On the same mountain where Moses had encountered the burning bush and the nation had received the Law, Elijah sought answers.

Why did he feel afraid and discouraged? After all, the Lord had

just won a memorable victory on Mount Carmel. One reason was a lack of faith (v. 3). Another was that he felt emotionally depressed, due to loneliness and conflict in ministry (vv. 4, 10, 14). In addition, he was physically exhausted and run-down (v. 5).

God met Elijah at each of his points of need. He provided bread, water, and time to rest (vv. 5–8). He gave him new work, revitalizing his sense of purpose (vv. 15–17). Elijah was to anoint Jehu as king, signaling the good news that the reign of Ahab and Jezebel was nearly finished. The Lord further told him that 7,000 others remained faithful (v. 18).

Personally for Elijah, God revealed a ministry successor to train, Elisha. Most importantly, God gave Elijah a fresh vision of Himself—one of relational care and faithfulness, conveyed in a “gentle whisper” (vv. 12–13).

APPLY THE WORD

Are you trusting God to meet your needs? They might be physical, emotional, social, or spiritual—or a combination of all of these. Just as Elijah did, you can tell the Lord directly what you’re thinking and how you’re feeling. He loves you and knows better than you how to encourage you and get you back on your feet!

PRAY WITH US

Mark Wagner, interim chief operating officer and trustee, will appreciate the prayers of the Moody family for his work of overseeing the Operations division and, together with the leadership team and trustees, charting the new course for MBI.

*I will deliver this vast army into your hands,
and you will know that I am the LORD.*

1 Kings 20:28

Lord of Both Mountains and Valleys

Atheism and agnosticism are higher than ever among American young people, according to research done by the Barna Group. Among those of Generation Z (ages 13 to 18), 21 percent declare themselves to be atheists or agnostics, as compared to 15 percent for Millennials, 13 percent for Generation X, and 9 percent for Baby Boomers. The percentage of teens who identify as atheists is double that of the general adult population (13% vs. 6%).

In today's reading, the Lord acted to defend the honor of His name against the slander of idol-worshippers. Like modern skeptics, they thought God was no bigger than their ideas of Him. In an Ancient Near Eastern worldview, idols and spirits were highly localized. That's why the Arameans (or Syrians) decided that the Israelite "gods" were only "gods of the hills" (v. 23), where they had lost a first battle (vv. 13–22). If they could fight a second battle on the plains instead,

where they believed their gods were stronger, then they could defeat them.

The one true God, however, does not fit this view. While mountains might be special places for meeting God, as we've seen, He is by no means geographically limited. He is Lord over all creation, certainly including both mountains and valleys. So even though Ahab was not a righteous king and led a militarily inferior army, a prophet from God told him he would win the battle: "This is what the LORD says: 'Because the Arameans think the LORD is a god of the hills and not a god of the valleys, I will deliver this vast army into your hands, and you will know that I am the LORD'" (v. 28). And that is exactly what happened!

A right view of God means that we recognize His reign over every area of our lives—including both our literal and metaphorical mountains and valleys.

APPLY THE WORD

Scripture gives us the names of many great men and women, including Moses, Elijah, Deborah, and Esther. But let's not forget all the unnamed heroes, such as the "prophet" or "man of God" in 1 Kings 20. He obediently played his part, then walked off the stage into the anonymity of history. Are we willing to do the same as followers of Jesus?

PRAY WITH US

Please join Ken Heulitt, chief financial officer, in prayer today, as he thanks God for His provision for MBI's ministries year after year, and for the faithful friends through whom He provides. We pray that this partnership would grow as we move forward.

*I will put breath in you,
and you will come to life.*

Ezekiel 37:6

Meeting God in the Valley of Dry Bones

Seventeenth-century Puritan minister William Bridge prayed, “Ah Lord, my prayers are dead, my affections dead and my heart is dead; but you are a living God and I bear myself upon you.” Our God is a God of life and hope, as we see in today’s reading. The topic of this vision is the end of the exile and the restoration of Israel, but it has also often been read in general terms as being about restoring life to something that was dead—that is, resurrection.

The opening picture is gruesome: a valley full of long-dead bones. It seems a battle had been lost here. God asked, “Can these bones live?” (v. 3). This is a rhetorical question; there’s no chance! But Ezekiel knew God is a God of the impossible, so he answered, “You alone know.” God responded that He would indeed bring life to this lifeless situation.

The restoration of life happened in two steps. First, the bones, tendons, flesh,

and skin attached themselves to one another in sequence (vv. 7–8). Second, the breath of life was breathed into the physical bodies (vv. 9–10). These are the same two steps—forming or making and then breathing in—seen in God’s original creation of humanity (Gen. 2:7).

The bones were the people of Israel (v. 11). Their hope was gone. They were living in exile, cut off from their homeland and (they thought) the covenant and promises of God. But He is faithful! This vision indicated that He would bring them back to their land (vv. 12–14).

The “Valley of Dry Bones” reveals much about God. He’s faithful, always keeping His word. He’s powerful enough to do the impossible. He’s the Creator, worthy to be worshiped. He gives hope and life. And He is in sovereign control of history.

APPLY THE WORD

Perhaps you feel abandoned, hopeless, or trapped in an impossible situation. Perhaps, like William Bridge, you feel emotionally dry or spiritually dead. His phrase, “I bear myself upon you,” means something like “I throw myself upon you” in contemporary English, and even suggests the meaning, “You, Lord, must carry me.”

PRAY WITH US

As we keep Moody’s finances in our prayers, please add the Office of the Treasurer to your list: Edgar Santiago, treasurer, Abigail Vega, Brian Nagel, Holly Motta, and Julie Vinlasaca. Thank the Lord for the professional skills and diligence of this team.

He took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray.

Luke 9:28

MONDAY
SEPTEMBER

10

Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration

The end of today’s narrative says, “The disciples kept this to themselves and did not tell anyone at that time what they had seen” (v. 36). Later, however, Peter put the Transfiguration at the center of his claim to be an apostle: “We did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’ We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain” (2 Peter 1:16–18).

The text doesn’t tell us the location of the Mount of Transfiguration. In Mark’s Gospel, it is identified as a “high mountain” (Mark 9:2), and different scholars have argued for Mount Hermon or Mount Tabor. Scripture

focuses on conveying the experience here, not the mountain’s name.

The experience of Peter, James, and John fits the biblical tradition of meeting God on the mountaintop. Eight days after predicting His death, Jesus took them up a mountain, where His divine glory was breathtakingly revealed. Luke compared it to a “flash of lightning” (v. 29). Mark rather amusingly wrote that Jesus’ clothes became “dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them” (Mark 9:3). Matthew simply said that Jesus “shone like the sun” and was “white as the light” (Matt. 17:2). Moses and Elijah appeared and discussed Jesus’ upcoming departure (vv. 30–31). And the voice of God the Father proclaimed, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him” (v. 35). The phrase “whom I have chosen” can also be translated “Chosen One,” a messianic reference to Isaiah 42:1.

APPLY THE WORD

A good response is to spend extra time in worship today! An appropriate passage would be Psalm 29, which emphasizes the awe-inspiring power of the “voice of the LORD.” However you choose to express your worship today, we encourage you to “Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.”

PRAY WITH US

Today we invite you to pray for the Investment Accounting team on our Chicago campus: Andrea Palmer-Reed, Daphne Hussey, Marilou Logan, and Tonya Reed. We appreciate their work of managing annuities and trusts, as they serve Moody’s donors with excellence.

TUESDAY
SEPTEMBER

11

God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark.

Genesis 8:1

The Ark Rested on Mount Ararat

Noah wasn't the only sailor who has used birds to help him navigate. Throughout history, mariners have used birds to guide their ships to dry land. Ravens fly toward the nearest land in a straight line, which can then be followed. Doves cannot keep flying for long, which helped indicate whether a landing site was nearby.

In this second focus within this month's devotional study, we will be considering mountains and valleys within famous biblical narratives. What roles did they play? What are their special significances within the "spiritual geography" of Scripture?

Noah, his family, and the animals had been in the ark for 150 days, or about five months, when it "came to rest on the mountains of Ararat" (8:4). Notice that a specific mountain is not named. This mountain range—mentioned only here in Scripture—is located in what

is today eastern Turkey. During the Flood, the water had covered the whole earth and risen above even the highest mountains (7:20). As a result, "Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out" (7:23), except for the people and animals on the Ark.

This event shows both God's holiness and His love. It shows His holiness in that He judged sin as it deserves, and it shows His love in that He mercifully saved a remnant with which to replenish life on earth (8:17). Though the Flood has frequently been called a myth, the account here reads like a series of ship's log entries. Noah and his family—and no doubt the animals as well—were more than eager to get off the boat! More than a year after they had first boarded, and seven months after the ship came to ground on the mountains of Ararat, that day finally came (8:13–20).

APPLY THE WORD

Following the Flood, God made rainbows into a sign of His covenant never to destroy the earth again in this way (8:21; 9:8–17). A rainbow is not only beautiful in its own right but also a reminder of God's love and faithfulness. If you don't have the opportunity to see an actual rainbow today, look up a photo as a visual reminder of God's love.

PRAY WITH US

Would you include in your prayers the ministry of Anthony Turner, VP and dean of Student Enrollment Services? We are grateful for his team's work, as they process hundreds of student applications every year.

God tested Abraham.

Genesis 22:1

WEDNESDAY
SEPTEMBER

12

A Sacrifice on Mount Moriah

Mount Fuji—or “Fuji-san” in Japanese—is the highest mountain in Japan at 12,380 feet. A dormant volcano, it is considered a treasured symbol of the nation. More than 200,000 tourists climb it every summer. The name *Fuji* originally meant “fire mountain” but also carries a traditional meaning of “immortality” or “everlasting life.”

In today’s narrative, Mount Moriah became a life-giving mountain. God tested Abraham to find out what was in his heart and whether he would obey or not. Did he value the Lord above his son? Did he value the One who had given the promise of an impossible child more than the fulfillment of the promise? Could he give up something he had waited so long for? Did he trust that God would keep His covenant regardless?

Abraham passed the test with flying colors. He had a three-day journey to

change his mind, but he held fast to God’s instruction. He told Isaac, “God himself will provide the lamb” (v. 8). He even believed that God could and would resurrect Isaac if necessary (Heb. 11:17–19). He bound his son, put him on an altar, and raised the knife before God intervened. He had withheld nothing from the Lord. There were no limits to his faith and obedience (v. 12). This provided an occasion for the covenant to be renewed (vv. 15–18).

This all happened at Mount Moriah, a mountain in the region of Moriah that God showed Abraham (vv. 2, 9). He named it, “The LORD Will Provide” (v. 14). Solomon would later build the temple on this same mountain (2 Chron. 3:1). Indeed, this is where we started this month—Mount Moriah became “the mountain of the Lord” (Isa. 2:2–3)! Today in Jerusalem, the Dome of the Rock is built on this same site.

APPLY THE WORD

Today, “The Lord Will Provide” atonement so that we can have a relationship with Him. Just as God provided a ram to die in Isaac’s place, He sent His Son to die as the Lamb of God in our place. We deserved death as the punishment for sin, but He paid it for us (Rom. 5:6–8). Those who believe on the name of Jesus receive eternal life (John 3:16)!

PRAY WITH US

Focus your prayers on our students today who come to Moody from across the country and from overseas. Pray that their time of studies would be rich and fruitful—in knowledge, spiritual growth, and friendships—leading to lifelong devotion to Christ.

THURSDAY
SEPTEMBER

13

They spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored.

Numbers 13:32

Foolishness in the Valley of Eshkol

In a book about parenting, Paul David Tripp described the nature of foolishness in the book of Proverbs: “The fool has the world inside out and upside down. The fool looks at what is foolish and sees it as wise. The fool looks at what is good and sees it as bad. The fool looks at what is false and sees it as true. . . . The fool argues with the wise and listens to other fools. The fool has it all wrong, but is convinced he is always right.”

Sadly, this description fits Israel in today’s reading. What happened in the Valley of Eshkol shaped the nation’s future (see Num. 32:9–13). Moses had sent twelve spies into the Promised Land to scout it out. In the Valley of Eshkol, near Hebron, they found a cluster of grapes so large it took two men to carry it on a pole between them (vv. 23–24). They also brought similarly rich samples of figs and pomegranates.

They should have interpreted this as encouragement from the Lord. He had indeed brought them to a land flowing with milk and honey (v. 27)!

Nonetheless, ten of the spies returned with a fearful report. From their perspective, the land was fertile and abundant but unconquerable (vv. 28–29, 31–33). Their timidity exhibited a rebellious lack of faith. They had apparently forgotten all the wonders God had already worked on their behalf. They thought they knew better than God the best choice.

The nation’s failure to obey God and step forward in faith had dire consequences. An entire generation, excluding Caleb and Joshua, were condemned to die in the wilderness. Entering the land was delayed for 40 years! These fools were convinced they were right, but they had it all wrong.

APPLY THE WORD

The spiritual geography of the Valley of Eshkol is where God’s blessings and instructions are clear, yet we fail to obey. This is foolish, but we do it all the time; we rely on our plans and perceptions above God’s promises and character. The antidote is to “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding” (Prov. 3:5).

PRAY WITH US

Moody Theological Seminary provides advanced Christian education in a flexible format. Join us in prayer for its ministry to the students under the leadership of vice president and dean of MTS, Dr. John Jelinek, who also serves as interim provost.

*Why have you brought this trouble on us?
The LORD will bring trouble on you today.*

Joshua 7:25

FRIDAY
SEPTEMBER

14

Wisdom in the Valley of Achor

David's adultery with Bathsheba was no private matter (see 2 Samuel 11–12). An individualistic culture such as ours might see only two consenting adults, but this transgression of God's law affected many others. Uriah lost his life. Joab became an accomplice to murder. The royal court witnessed David's sin and cover-up. And the name of the Lord was besmirched throughout the nation of Israel, over which David ruled as God's anointed king.

The ripple effects of sin and its consequences are also seen in today's narrative (vv. 11–12). Because Achan had taken spoils from Jericho that he should not have, since they were devoted to the Lord, the Israelites lost their next battle against the city of Ai (v. 1).

They responded to this defeat wisely, halting the military campaign to inquire of the Lord. They also acted obediently, punishing the guilty once the truth

was revealed. In addition, they acted worshipfully, since Joshua's main concern was the glory of God's name (vv. 7–9).

Achan did not confess until he had already been identified as the culprit. In this context, his crime earned him and his family a death sentence. As Proverbs 15:27 reminds us: "The greedy bring ruin to their households." After they were executed by stoning, the bodies were burned as a way to purify the community and land from the evil that had been done.

The Israelites named the place the Valley of Achor, meaning "trouble" or "disaster," and set up a memorial (or warning) heap of stones (v. 26). In terms of spiritual geography, this valley was a place both where the sin of one member of the community resulted in defeat and where the nation responded to this situation wisely and faithfully.

APPLY THE WORD

Spend time in confession of sin. This is to be a regular spiritual discipline for us, as we are daily in need of the Lord's forgiveness (see 1 John 1:9). Confession and repentance involve sorrow over sin and choosing to turn away from it and go in a different direction. You might be helped by reading Psalm 51, David's psalm of confession.

PRAY WITH US

Moody Radio's Strategic Marketing department executes campaign strategy, program planning, and management. Praise God for its ministry of supporting Moody Radio, and pray for George Economos, Hannah LaMaster, and Jamel Gardner.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

by Dr. Rosalie de Rosset, Professor of English, Literature, and Homiletics

Q Jacob, David, Solomon, and Abraham—to name a few in the Bible—were men who had more than one wife. Why were these men honored and blessed by God? They broke God’s commandment! Did God wink at their sin back then, but now He condemns it?

A When we study the Old Testament, we find neither an explicit condemnation of polygamy nor explicit approval. Therefore, we must look carefully at the text of Scripture to see the consequences of this kind of behavior. What becomes apparent is that polygamy is detrimental everywhere it occurs; it is never shown in Scripture as a good thing. As Tim Keller has noted, the Bible may record polygamy, but it “subverts it at every turn.” Polygamy always caused rivalry and trouble. Lamech, a murderer, is the first example given in Genesis of someone who practiced polygamy (Gen. 4:19–24). In Deuteronomy 17:17, God denounces the kings’ practice of taking multiple wives. Every biblical account that includes a reference to polygamy is laden with jealousy, favoritism, and abuse—see the stories of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar; Jacob and his two wives and two concubines; the rivalries between David’s wives and their children; and Solomon’s entanglement in foreign gods by his many marriages. Clearly, the

Bible’s record of problematic behaviors should not be read as an endorsement.

From the opening chapters of the Bible, the teaching is consistent that marriage is between a husband and a wife, not between a man and his wives. God makes one wife, Eve, for Adam (Gen. 2:18–25). The New Testament says that “the two will become one flesh” (Matt. 19:5), and the books of Timothy and Titus all prohibit leaders in the church from practicing polygamy.

Biblical history shows the devastating consequences of human rebellion against God’s commands, but it also reveals God’s overwhelming grace despite our sin. Men like Abraham and David were blessed in spite of their substantial flaws, and they—like us—had many sins including deceit, lust, and greed. In our own lives, we can see that God is gracious to us in times of disobedience.

Q I often pay all-consuming attention to my sin. I never feel like I measure up, and so many sermons in church and talks I hear on the radio bring me to a kind of despair and shame over my unworthiness. I have been wondering what my attitude about my sin should be, especially when we are told to be sensitive to sin and confess our sins regularly.

*The Bible's record of problematic behaviors
should never be read as an endorsement.*

A I think what you are describing is the downside of a careful, conscientious nature. I suspect it is part of many people's experience. Certainly, consciousness of sin and knowledge of the particulars is a biblical principle. One of my students wrote this about her awareness of this problem, a realization she came to during a Good Friday service: "The service I went to last night convicted me of a sin whose gravity I did not really see earlier. I repented because I had been doubting God's love." She goes on to note that the believer's awareness of sin "should not lead to self-defeating shame, but to joy and gratitude to God who has ransomed us by His great love." She admits that she has failed to grasp that immense love and realizes she needs to take God's love seriously. To doubt that love, she adds, is to be "ungrateful and irreverent" about what Jesus did in His death and resurrection.

To help meditate on God's love, I would recommend reading the words of some of the great hymns, such as "How Deep the Father's Love for Us" or "O Sacred Head Now Wounded", the last verse of which reads, "What language shall I borrow / To thank Thee dearest Friend, / for this, Thy dying sorrow, / Thy pity without end? / O make me Thine forever! / And should I fainting be / Lord, let me never, never, / outlive my love for Thee."

Q I often hear the apostle Thomas described as "doubting Thomas," a bad example. When I read the story, I wonder if that's the sum of who he was?

A Just this Easter, my pastor preached a defense of Thomas! Thomas is often reduced to his experience with doubt, but there is more to his story. When other disciples tried to keep Jesus from going to Bethany to raise Lazarus from the dead because He might be in danger, Thomas said to them, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (John 11:8–16). According to church history, Thomas went to share the gospel in India, where he was martyred.

Even more importantly, Jesus took Thomas seriously, as He takes every one of us who comes through a period of doubt. This passage becomes a great comfort when seen in that light. True, Thomas was not there on Easter Sunday night—but he was present a week later, when Christ appeared again to His disciples. Jesus told Thomas to touch His wounds, then said, "Stop doubting, and believe." Overcome, Thomas uttered his unforgettable confession: "My Lord and my God!" What a transformation! In this way, Thomas's story becomes a record of doubt that turned into conviction and unshakable love for Jesus.

SATURDAY
SEPTEMBER

15

Joshua read all the words of the law—the blessings and the curses.

Joshua 8:34

Mount Ebal or Mount Gerizim?

The site of Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim had deep roots in Israelite history. When God first called him out of Ur, Abraham built an altar there, at “the great tree of Moreh at Shechem” (Gen. 12:6). The city of Shechem was still there, more or less in between the two mountains, when Joshua and the people returned centuries later during the conquest of Canaan. They eventually buried Joseph’s bones there (Josh. 24:32). And before he died, Joshua led the nation in renewing the covenant there (24:1–28).

Even before the Israelites arrived in the Promised Land in their sojourn from Egypt, God had set aside Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim for an important purpose. The blessings associated with obedience would be read aloud from Mount Gerizim, and the curses associated with disobedience would be read aloud from Mount Ebal (see Deut.

11:26–29). Half the people were to stand in front of each mountain, and this was to be a formal occasion for renewing the covenant as a nation (v. 33). (A full statement of both blessings and curses is found in Deuteronomy 27–28.)

Today’s reading marks the first time this was actually done. The event included not only reading aloud from the Law but also offering burnt and fellowship sacrifices on an altar Joshua had built on Mount Ebal (v. 30). In addition, using plaster, the Law was copied onto large stones for all to see (v. 32).

Israel had only defeated Jericho and Ai at this point, so obedience was an act of faith that God would help them conquer the rest of the land. It was also an act of remembering all that the Lord had done for them already and of taking seriously their covenant responsibilities.

APPLY THE WORD

We rarely hear the Bible read aloud except during the Sunday morning service. But this is a tradition we could benefit from recovering! You can make reading Scripture aloud a habit in your family or small group. You might even use a good audio Bible for this purpose. An excellent free resource is faithcomesbyhearing.com.

PRAY WITH US

Include in your prayer time Moody Radio’s WMBI station based in Chicago. Pray that through the ministry of Alexandra Domercant, Desiree Owen, Jon Hemmer, and Diana Berryman the message of Jesus Christ would reach more homes and hearts.

*They have forsaken me and
made this a place of foreign gods.*

Jeremiah 19:4

SUNDAY
SEPTEMBER

16

Judgment in the Valley of Ben Hinnom

The worship of Molek (also spelled Molech) was a particularly notorious Ancient Near Eastern religion. Known in Scripture as the “detestable god of the Ammonites” (1 Kings 11:5, 17), Molek demanded child-sacrifice. This practice was strictly forbidden by the Mosaic Law, on pain of death. A person who did this, God said, “has defiled my sanctuary and profaned my holy name” (Lev. 20:2–5).

But the Israelites did practice idolatry and child-sacrifice to Baal and Molek in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, on the border between Judah and Benjamin, south and west of Jerusalem. Because of this horrific sin, God declared its real name to be the “Valley of Slaughter” (vv. 4–6). It was also called Topheth, meaning “fire pit.” The abbreviated Hebrew name for the Valley of Ben Hinnom is *ge’hi’nom*, later transliterated into the Greek name *Gehenna*, which came to symbolize hell. The expression

“fire of hell” in Matthew 5:22 and 18:9 is literally, “Gehenna of fire.”

In response, the prophet Jeremiah brought a message of judgment. Because of the idolatry and other rebellious sins, Israel would suffer a humiliating military defeat in this very valley (vv. 7–9). Jerusalem would become “an object of horror and scorn.” The shocking description even includes cannibalism resulting from hunger. This happened in 586 B.C., during the siege and conquest of Jerusalem by the Babylonian Empire.

This teaches an important lesson in spiritual geography. Only a brief distance from the “holy mountain” on which the people of God worshiped lay this vile place in which the worst kinds of pagan idolatry were practiced . . . by the same people! Both literally and figuratively, the journey from righteousness to sin can be all too short.

APPLY THE WORD

The prophet Jeremiah was persecuted for his dire warning, even though it was the word of the Lord (20:1–2). We, too, can expect to suffer for speaking God’s truth in the face of sin. When we do, we can be encouraged by the words of Peter: “If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name” (1 Peter 4:16).

PRAY WITH US

Again, Moody Radio’s WMBI FM comes to the top of our prayer list. Thank the Lord in prayer for Matthew McNeilly, Karl Clauson, Hannah Pfederer, and Norma Malave—committed to helping listeners grow in faith and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

*I come against you in the name of the LORD
Almighty . . . whom you have defied.*

1 Samuel 17:45

Facing Goliath in the Valley of Elah

The world record for the largest hamburger is held by a café in Sydney, Australia. It took twelve hours to cook and four men to flip the 178-pound burger, which was served with 120 eggs, 150 slices of cheese, beetroot, lettuce, and tomato—these are preferred hamburger fixings in Australia—all on a giant sesame seed bun. Who ate it? Employees at the café. How much would it cost to order? \$1,220!

Some things are so huge that they're just plain scary. That was the case with Goliath in today's reading. He was nearly ten feet tall, wore absurdly heavy armor, and was an experienced and formidable warrior. The Israelite and Philistine armies were perched on two hills, with the Valley of Elah in between. The Valley of Elah ran west from Bethlehem to Gath. The army that controlled it would gain access to the heartland of Judah and Benjamin.

Each day Goliath strode into the Valley of Elah and issued a challenge for individual combat (vv. 8–10). Rather than engage in a full-scale battle, the conflict would be settled by individual champions. The Israelites, however, were terrified and sent no one (v. 11). So, with the valley making a kind of natural theater, every day Goliath went onstage to mock the enemy with his blasphemous boasts.

That's why David responded to the challenge. He was motivated by the honor and glory of God's name (vv. 45–47). By any human estimation, he was bound to lose. But since "the battle is the LORD's," he defeated the giant and the battle was won (vv. 47–53).

The Valley of Elah shows us that we can take on challenges that seem too big—rightly motivated by God's glory and not our own—because nothing is too hard for the Lord.

APPLY THE WORD

What is your biggest problem? Does it have you "hiding in the tents," hoping it just goes away? Do you see no realistic way of solving or defeating it? In that case, it's weakening your faith and mocking your God, and needs to be challenged in prayerful faith. The size of the problem doesn't matter—what matters is the size of our God!

PRAY WITH US

Would you join us in prayer for Jim Elliott, VP of Stewardship? Ask God to give him strength and joy every day, as he serves Moody and our donors across the country. May the Lord always guide Moody along the road of good stewardship!

*How long will you waver
between two opinions?*

1 Kings 18:21

TUESDAY
SEPTEMBER

18

Facing Baal on Mount Carmel

The hymnwriter Isaac Watts wrote these classic lyrics: “I sing the mighty power of God that made the mountains rise, / that spread the flowing seas abroad and built the lofty skies. / I sing the wisdom that ordained the sun to rule the day; / the moon shines full at his command and all the stars obey.”

There is only one true God, the Creator of all. Despite their special covenant relationship with Him, the Israelites had forsaken Him and worshiped Baal and Asherah instead. So the prophet Elijah called for a showdown on Mount Carmel, a high ridge next to the Mediterranean Sea, near the modern city of Haifa.

On the surface, it appears that the enemies in this challenge were the false gods and their priests as well as the evil rulers of Israel, King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. They even served the priests of Baal at their own royal table!

But beneath the surface, the Israelites themselves were part of the problem. When given the opportunity, they remained silent, refusing to choose their faithful covenant God (v. 21). So the real challenge was to win back the hearts and worship of the people of Israel (vv. 36–37).

Elijah was focused on this outcome (vv. 38–39). He prompted the people. He taunted the priests of Baal and Asherah and mocked these so-called gods themselves. He made a point of increasing the degree of difficulty by pouring water all over the altar of the Lord. He had no doubt that God would answer his prayer and humiliate the idolaters.

Like the Valley of Elah, Mount Carmel shows us that the faith of a David or an Elijah is a sure thing, not a long shot. God can win any victory against any odds for the honor of His name!

APPLY THE WORD

It might be tempting to blame an Ahab or a Baal for our problems. But what about the ordinary Israelite who remained silent in answer to Elijah’s challenge? The good news for us is that our God has made us “more than conquerors” in any case (Rom. 8:31–39)! Rely on Him as you face open or covert spiritual conflicts today.

PRAY WITH US

Today’s ministry is impossible without social media and digital marketing. For the next three days, please pray for MBI’s Digital Media Marketing team. Today, our prayer is for Noelle Bud, Kiel Russell, and Karsten Smith.

WEDNESDAY
SEPTEMBER

19

*My help comes from the LORD,
the Maker of heaven and earth.*

Psalm 121:2

“Where Does My Help Come From?”

Frida was a very special member of the Mexican Navy. An eight-year-old Labrador (now retired), she was a rescue dog who searched for survivors under rubble and debris after earthquakes. Wearing goggles and special booties, she helped locate and save twelve people after an 8.1-magnitude quake in Oaxaca one year ago. Just weeks later, she also helped sniff out survivors of a 7.1-magnitude quake in Mexico City.

“Where does my help come from?” the psalmist asked (v. 1). The answer: “My help comes from the LORD” (v. 2). But why does the first line read, “I lift up my eyes to the mountains”? Is it because God is a God of the mountains? No. We already know He’s not like the localized pagan idols, but is Lord over mountains, valleys, and all of creation. Is it because a beautiful mountain reminds him of the Creator? No, it’s more contextualized

than that. He referred specifically to the city of Jerusalem and the temple mount, often called “Mount Zion.”

Psalm 121 is a “song of ascents.” Pilgrims to Jerusalem sang it on the way in order to prepare their hearts for worship and major festivals. It was thus very natural for them to lift their heads and see above them their destination, the city, and within the city the mount on which the temple had been built. This sight led automatically to thoughts of God, His covenant, and His faithful love (see Ps. 125:1–2).

The rest of the psalm goes on to describe God’s faithful covenant love. He watches over us tirelessly (vv. 3–4). He protects us from any threat day (sun) or night (moon) (vv. 5–6). He keeps us from all harm (vv. 7–8). Pilgrims could use these verses as they praised the Lord and encouraged one another.

APPLY THE WORD

This psalm contains a word for those who are lonely: God is with you. He doesn’t take breaks. He isn’t busy elsewhere. He’s watching over you and your life. He cares about you. He knows if even one foot is about to slip. There’s no need to be afraid. Jesus likewise promised, “Surely I am with you always” (Matt. 28:20).

PRAY WITH US

Again, Digital Media Marketing is in our prayers, today for our email marketing and web content specialists: Emily Alvarado, Jacob Rositano, and Elizabeth Doogan. May the Holy Spirit guide them as they keep Moody connected with our friends.

*I will fear no evil,
for you are with me.*

Psalm 23:4

THURSDAY
SEPTEMBER

20

Dark Valleys and the Good Shepherd

Logan Runnalls introduces *Into the Valley: Spiritual Reflections on Depression* with these words: “The following is a series of explorations into my depression and my healing. It is part confession and part question. This is my heart as I know it. There are no new secrets to success revealed in this book. The one great secret was made known long ago in the God-man, Jesus Christ. While the darkness that I have wrestled with might be unique in many ways, the Light that has revealed my heart to me is constant and available to all.”

Our Shepherd is always with us, even in the darkest of valleys (v. 4). Generations of readers treasured this translation: “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.” This might include any kind of peril, danger, or suffering. Evil is the cause of such things, not in the

sense of personal wrongdoing but in the sense that sin has corrupted and spoiled the world as it should be.

What matters is that we do not endure it alone. Our loving Shepherd walks with us every step of the way (v. 1). His rod and staff symbolize His protection, rescue, guidance, and authority.

The spiritual geography of this psalm includes more than dark valleys. We also have “green pastures” and “quiet waters,” meaning times of blessing, refreshment, contentment, and abundance (vv. 2–3). There is a banquet table at which David is the honored (anointed) guest (vv. 5–6). God is the sovereign King, and David as king of Israel is His vassal and guest—and thus totally secure in the face of his enemies. Instead of running from them, he’s being “chased” by God’s goodness and love. His cup overflows with blessings!

APPLY THE WORD

Verse 4 is the point in the psalm when David switches from third person to second person and begins to address God directly. It is often the “dark valleys” of our lives that draw us closer to the Lord. Perhaps you need to talk to Him today about a valley you’re in, or have been in, that’s darkening your life. He’s already there with you!

PRAY WITH US

In conclusion, please put these Digital Marketing team members on your list: Dominic Kindler, David Kyroutac, Andrew Youngquist, and Alexandra Horn. Pray that God would give them creativity, inspiration, joy, and perseverance in their service.

FRIDAY
SEPTEMBER

21

*His disciples came to him,
and he began to teach them.*

Matthew 5:1–2

The Sermon on the Mount

In January, Open Doors presented its 2018 World Watch List of which countries have the worst persecution of Christians. The organization reports that 215 million followers of Christ—about 1 in 12—live where their faith is “illegal, forbidden, or punished.” Top on the list is North Korea, which has filled that spot for sixteen years. Next are Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, and Pakistan.

Jesus taught that in God’s kingdom being persecuted earns a special reward (vv. 10–12). This was the last “Beatitude” in His famous Sermon on the Mount. The location is not specified in Scripture, but according to tradition this sermon was delivered near Capernaum, on a mountainside at the northwest corner of the Sea of Galilee. It has been called an inaugural address for the kingdom of God and compared to the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai. Many of its sections begin with a reference to the Law, “You have heard that it was said,” before

Jesus explained the kingdom standards. In our own strength, we’re incapable of meeting these standards, especially since the summary statement is “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (v. 48).

The Beatitudes describe how godly qualities entail various blessings. The “poor in spirit” depend entirely on the Lord and enjoy a relationship with Him. “Those who mourn” will have enduring comfort. The “meek” forego their own agenda and will in turn receive a godly inheritance, while those who “hunger and thirst for righteousness” have a deep desire for justice that will be filled.

The “merciful” extend and receive compassion and forgiveness, the “pure in heart” demonstrate a holiness that reveals how deeply they know God, and “peacemakers” pursue reconciliation among people that points to God’s own desire for reconciliation.

APPLY THE WORD

We can never achieve the standard of the Beatitudes by our own hard work and effort. We must rely on the Holy Spirit, who works in our lives to sanctify us completely (see 1 Peter 1:2). Pray that He will help you know God’s blessings of mercy, holiness, reconciliation, and comfort as you grow in your relationship with the Lord.

PRAY WITH US

Please mention in your prayers vice president and general counsel at Moody, Janet Stiven, and her team in the Legal department. They have the experience and the knowledge to serve MBI and our friends across the country, for God’s glory.

*Father, if you are willing,
take this cup from me.*

Luke 22:42

SATURDAY
SEPTEMBER

22

“Not My Will, But Yours Be Done”

The Gethsemane Church of All Nations, also known as the Basilica of the Agony, was built in 1924 at the traditional site of the Garden of Gethsemane. Inside the church is a rock, now enclosed by a wrought-iron crown of thorns, said to be where Christ prayed on the night before His crucifixion. The church’s ceiling domes suggest a night sky—blue with stars, accompanied by olive branches to evoke the garden.

The Garden of Gethsemane lay on the lower slopes of the Mount of Olives, one of Jesus’ favorite places (note “as usual” in v. 39). The Mount of Olives, a long ridge east of Jerusalem, stood some 100 to 200 feet higher than the city itself and provided a good view of Jerusalem. Not surprisingly, it had many olive trees growing there. The name *Gethsemane* means “olive press” or “oil press.”

The focus of today’s reading is Jesus’ prayer: “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done” (v. 42). The “cup” was the cup of God’s wrath and the suffering for sin that Jesus was about to undergo. He was perfectly submitted to His Father’s will, but He also needed to pray in order to remain perfectly submitted. The struggle was real, for an angel was sent to strengthen Him and “His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground” (vv. 43–44). He had invited His disciples to pray with Him, but they had been too sad and tired to do so.

Prayer here includes watchfulness, a way to stay on guard spiritually. Jesus was tempted to resist His Father’s will. His disciples’ faith was tempted to falter in the face of crisis (vv. 40, 46). The response to both temptations: “Devote yourself to prayer, being watchful and thankful” (Col. 4:2).

APPLY THE WORD

In the spiritual geography of our own lives, do we have a place to retreat and pray? When we do, the prayer “Not my will, but yours be done” is always appropriate. We often bring God a grocery list of needs and concerns—and He is pleased when we trust Him to provide. But we should also follow the example of Jesus and pray to submit better.

PRAY WITH US

We are grateful for the computer skills and expertise of our Enterprise Infrastructure Services staff who provide Moody with sound computer communication capabilities. Would you pray for Paul Walker, Michael Paniak, and Kyle Sparrow?

*If I have a faith that can move mountains,
but do not have love, I am nothing.*

1 Corinthians 13:2

Faith that Moves Mountains

D. L. Moody said: “I believe in definite prayer. Abraham prayed for Sodom. Moses interceded for the children of Israel. How often our prayers go all around the world, without real definite asking for anything! And often, when we do ask, we don’t expect anything. Many people would be surprised if God did answer their prayers.”

Prayer must be accompanied by faith. The object and quality of our faith is what matters; Jesus taught that even if faith were as small as a mustard seed, great things could be done (v. 20). Jesus’ expression “move mountains” has since become an English idiom meaning to overcome enormous challenges or accomplish the impossible (see also Matt. 21:21–22).

On what does the quality of faith depend? James described praying in faith as praying in expectation rather than doubt (James 1:6–8).

John explained that the key is asking according to God’s will (1 John 5:14–15). We can have confidence that the sovereign Lord of all will surely hear our prayer. This further suggests that one key purpose of prayer is to align our wills with His.

“Nothing will be impossible for you” does not mean that faith is some sort of magic ticket or mantra, as prosperity gospels claim. In context, Jesus was referring to challenges related to the work of God’s kingdom. One study Bible summarized the meaning this way: “Nothing that Christ authorizes His disciples to do will be impossible.” Jesus also linked such faith with prayerfulness (Mark 9:29).

In today’s verse, Paul pointed out that faith without love is worthless (1 Cor. 13:2). All this indicates that faith that can move mountains is part of an overall lifestyle of Christian discipleship.

APPLY THE WORD

Perhaps it’s time to conduct a deeper check on our prayer lives. Do we, as Moody warned, pray too generally or vaguely because our doubt is stronger than our expectation? Are we praying for our wills to be submitted to and aligned with God’s? Do we truly believe in the power of prayer because we believe in the power of God?

PRAY WITH US

Please add to your Enterprise Infrastructure Services prayer list these system administrators: Joseph Kessinger, William Eyerdom, and Joseph Straw. Pray that they would work well as a team and continue to encourage one another in faith and service.

You have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.

Hebrews 12:22

MONDAY
SEPTEMBER

24

Mountain of Law versus Mountain of Grace

Billy Graham spent his life preaching the gospel. Through his famous evangelistic crusades, he spoke directly to an estimated 215 million people in 185 countries. Countless millions more were reached through radio, television, books, magazines, and the internet. He said: “Our eyes ought to be on eternity and heaven—on the things that really matter.”

Graham committed his life sharing that good news of salvation found only in Christ. Today’s reading puts the gospel in terms of spiritual geography—a mountain of law contrasted with a mountain of grace. The “mountain” to which believers have come is not Mount Sinai, full of smoke and fire and the fearful voice of God (vv. 18–21). Instead, it is Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, where God dwells (vv. 22–24). On Mount Zion we will find joyful angels, the church and “the spirits of the righteous made perfect,”

as well as “Jesus the mediator of a new covenant” made with His blood.

There is no reason to return to the bondage of sin. There is no incentive to try to please God with the feeble efforts of our own righteousness. We must accept that Jesus is the mediator, and He has made a way for us to know God. For example, the blood of Abel demands justice because he was an innocent victim. Even greater is the blood of Christ, also an innocent victim, which has redemptive power to forgive our sin and ensure our eternal future with God.

If God’s voice demanded attention under the old covenant, how much more so now (vv. 25–27)! With greater revelation comes greater responsibility. After all, when the end times come—described as all the shaking—only the kingdom of God which cannot be shaken will remain.

APPLY THE WORD

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe” (v. 28). Spend time worshiping the Lord, whether through singing, praying, studying, or another way. Also spend time in gratitude and thankfulness for the wonderful inheritance made possible by Jesus.

PRAY WITH US

Paul Santhouse, VP of Publications, welcomes your prayers for his teams at Moody Publishers. Ask the Lord to keep their unity of vision and mission, their love for God and His Word, and enthusiasm for bringing His truth to their readers.

TUESDAY
SEPTEMBER

25

*Mountains of Israel,
hear the word of the LORD.*

Ezekiel 36:1

Homecoming and Hope

Exile is a significant, recurring theme in Scripture. Following their sin, Adam and Eve were exiled from the Garden of Eden. Cain was punished with exile after committing the first murder. Israel was exiled and scattered after the Assyrian and Babylonian conquests. Even Joseph, Mary, and Jesus spent a short time in exile in Egypt, fleeing from the wrath of King Herod.

Exile, however, is not the end of the story. God has prepared a homecoming! In this final section of our month's study, we'll examine images of mountains in Bible prophecy, where we'll see how they play an important role in this homecoming theme.

Ezekiel was commissioned to prophesy to the mountains of Israel (v. 1). This literary approach personifies the mountains, as if they can hear and respond. The mountains and the land in general are of course symbols of the

nation of Israel. Whatever happens to one happens to the other.

The message was that the enemies of Israel will be judged (vv. 2–7). They thought that since Israel had been conquered and its people sent into exile that the land now belonged to them. They had gleefully and maliciously taken advantage of the situation, plundering whatever they could. They were the embodiment of kicking someone when they're down, and their actions had offended the Lord. This would stop (vv. 13–15).

Israel, on the other hand, will be blessed (vv. 8–12). The people would return from exile to their homeland. In preparation, the fields should be replowed and the towns rebuilt. God's faithful love for His people would be renewed and they would prosper again. They deserved none of this, but they had a loving, faithful, covenant-keeping God!

APPLY THE WORD

Some days we feel as though we've been exiled or abandoned by God. A good psalm to read is Psalm 13, which begins: "How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart?" The emotions are honest—and so is the faith.

PRAY WITH US

As we continue to uphold Moody Publishers in prayer, please ask for God's blessing on the service of the Business Manager department. Pray for wisdom in strategy and day-to-day tasks for Duane Koenig, Gregory Miller, and Michael Davis.

You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain . . . lift up your voice with a shout.

Isaiah 40:9

WEDNESDAY
SEPTEMBER

26

Comfort and Glory

“Go, tell it on the mountain,” the classic spiritual urges, “over the hills and everywhere; go, tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born. . . . Down in a lowly manger the humble Christ was born, and God sent us salvation that blessed Christmas morn.”

Go tell it on the mountain indeed (v. 9)! The Gospel of Luke links verses 3 through 5 in today’s reading with the coming of John the Baptist as the forerunner of the Messiah, Jesus (see Luke 3:3–9). As sometimes happens in biblical prophecy, there seems to be what has been described as a “double mountain-range perspective” in view. That is, from a distance we see two mountain ranges, and it’s not clear how much time or space lies between the first and the second.

The first “mountain range” or fulfillment of this prophecy is Israel’s return from exile (vv. 1–2). The second is the

coming of the Messiah (vv. 3–5). It’s as if everyone is getting ready for a king’s arrival. His representatives are checking to see that everything has been prepared. Has a proper “royal highway” been built? Have all obstacles been removed? Figuratively, valleys should be raised, mountains lowered, rugged places smoothed over, and crooked spots straightened out.

People and their “faithfulness” are short-lived and fickle, like grass or wildflowers. God’s word, on the other hand stands forever. In other words, the promises that Israel will return from exile and that Messiah is coming can be absolutely counted upon!

“Go tell it on the mountain” (vv. 9–11)! The king is God Himself, the faithful shepherd of His people. The result of these prophecies and their fulfillments is reflected in today’s title—human comfort (or good news) and divine glory.

APPLY THE WORD

“The word of our God endures forever” (v. 8). In its pages we find both comfort for a lost and hopeless humanity and abundant revelation of the character and glory of God. Your time spent studying Scripture will always be useful for your growth in knowing more of God’s glory (2 Tim. 3:16). Invite others to join you in studying His Word!

PRAY WITH US

Moody Publishers staff is again in our prayers. Your prayers will be an encouragement for its Acquisitions team—Drew Dyck, Duane Sherman, and Randall Payleitner, as they reach out to authors and readers.

THURSDAY
SEPTEMBER

27

*On that day his feet will stand on
the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem.*

Zechariah 14:4

Our Lord on the Mount of Olives

At 8:10 a.m. on the morning of January 13, 2018, a heart-stopping alert was transmitted to cellphones throughout Hawaii: “Ballistic missile threat inbound to Hawaii. Seek immediate shelter. This is not a drill.” Understandably, panic ensued. For all people knew, the world as they knew it was about to end. As it turns out, the alert was the result of human error—but that was not announced until 38 minutes later.

Today’s reading describes the real end of the world—the Second Coming of Christ. On that day, our risen Lord will stand on the Mount of Olives, just as He did so often during His first advent. Prior to His return, Israel’s enemies will band together and go to war, and Jerusalem will be defeated (vv. 1–2). A graphic picture is painted of ransacked homes, plundered goods, and raped women. But the phrase “I will gather” reminds

us that God is in sovereign control the entire time.

At the moment of apparent defeat, Christ will return as a Divine Warrior to rescue His people (vv. 3–5). He’ll stand—literally and physically and accompanied by His “holy ones”—on the Mount of Olives, from which He had ascended (see Acts 1). It will be split in two, creating a valley and a path of escape for the people of Israel. That day will be unique, neither clearly day nor night. Water sources will be miraculously revitalized, providing for the people’s needs. The Messiah “will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name” (v. 9).

Jesus came to Earth the first time to serve and to die for our sins; this second time He will come to rule and to judge the entire Earth.

APPLY THE WORD

The phrase “day of the Lord” (v. 1) is often used in biblical prophecy and generally indicates the end times and judgment. To learn more, read 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11 and 2 Peter 3. The emphasis in these passages is not on details and timelines but rather on living godly lives in light of Christ’s return.

PRAY WITH US

To conclude our prayer for Moody Publishers’ Acquisitions team, join us in thanking God for John Hinkley, Judith Dunagan, and Kevin Emmert who expand Moody’s publishing ministry.

Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob.

Isaiah 2:3

FRIDAY
SEPTEMBER

28

The Mountain of the Lord, Part 1

In the north garden at the United Nations in New York City stands a sculpture entitled, “Let Us Beat Swords into Plowshares.” A gift from the former Soviet Union, this bronze artwork was created in 1957 by Evgeniy Vuchetich. It shows a blacksmith hammering a sword into a plow, “symbolizing man’s desire to put an end to war and convert the means of destruction into creative tools for the benefit of all mankind.”

This sculpture is based on the prophet Isaiah, especially verse 4 in today’s reading: “They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.” This marvelous prophecy will be fulfilled when Christ establishes His kingdom after His Second Coming.

At that time, “The mountain of the LORD’s temple will be established as

the highest of the mountains” (v. 2). The “mountain of the Lord” or “Mount Zion” is Jerusalem. The nations will go there to learn about God, not merely out of intellectual curiosity but for the purpose of obedience (v. 3). This includes even the enemies who had attacked Jerusalem before Christ returned (see Zech. 14:16). He will rule, judge, and keep the peace with perfect justice (v. 4). “The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD” (Isa. 11:9).

Another picture of this time is of a feast or a banquet. “On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples” (Isa. 25:6). This is a banquet suitable for the coronation of the King and for the “wedding supper of the Lamb” (see Rev. 19:9). Death and sorrow will be no more. We will sing: “This is the LORD, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation” (Isa. 25:9; Rev. 19:7).

APPLY THE WORD

In light of these glorious truths, “let us walk in the light of the LORD” (v. 5). Walking is a metaphor for living life. To walk in this way of the Lord means to love, worship, and obey Him now, as all the world will do one day. By doing so we become the “aroma of Christ” and bring glory to God (see 2 Cor. 2:14–15; 1 Peter 2:12).

PRAY WITH US

Since its founding by D. L. Moody in 1894, Moody Publishers has distributed more than 300 million books. Today, its Sales department continues to build on this legacy. Will you pray for Adam Dalton, David DeHaan, Dean Galiano, and Richard Knox?

*The law will go out from Zion,
the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.*

Micah 4:2

The Mountain of the Lord, Part 2

Near the end of John Milton’s Christian epic poem *Paradise Lost*, the archangel Michael takes Adam to the top of a mountain. There he shows him visions of future history. Having chosen to disobey God’s command, Adam and Eve were about to be exiled from Eden. What lay ahead for humanity? Was there any hope? Yes! Though Adam saw a future with much sin and rebelliousness, he also saw clear evidence that God is in control and has a loving plan of redemption. There was no reason for despair.

We, too, can find hope on the “mountain of the Lord”! Today’s reading closely resembles yesterday’s (especially the first three verses) and has the same time period in view. Christ has returned and set up His kingdom. He will rule from Jerusalem, which will be “the highest of the mountains” politically and spiritually (v. 1). The city will be the world

center for worship and learning about God (v. 2).

With Christ as King, there will be perfect justice and perfect peace. Instead of training for war, everyone will sit at home under their own fig tree, enjoying security and prosperity (vv. 3–4). Life on earth will be the way it was meant to be. There will be no more war, no more death, and no more idolatry.

“This is what the LORD says: ‘I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the Faithful City, and the mountain of the LORD Almighty will be called the Holy Mountain’” (Zech. 8:3). Israel needed this hope (v. 5). They had been conquered and exiled. Their temple had been destroyed. We, too, need this hope. We live in a fallen world full of sin and death. But when Christ returns, all that will change!

APPLY THE WORD

One way to “put your hope in the Lord both now and forevermore” (Ps. 131:3) is to memorize Scripture. Why not memorize yesterday’s or today’s Bible passage? God’s Word will be right there to encourage and strengthen your faith. Sometimes the road seems long, but at the end of it lies the Celestial City!

PRAY WITH US

Please uphold in prayer the ministry of Moody Radio’s WFCM station, broadcasting in Tennessee. May the Lord guide its staff—Scott Thunder, Dawn May, and Jonathan Garrison—in spreading the gospel and encouraging believers.

*Shout for joy to the LORD,
all the earth.*

Psalm 98:4

SUNDAY
SEPTEMBER

30

“Let the Mountains Sing Together for Joy”

At the end of *The Last Battle*, the final book in the Chronicle of Narnia series by C. S. Lewis, the world ends. But the characters remain, and they are drawn to journey “further up and further in.” They realize that they are in the “real Narnia” and that the world they had known was but a “shadowland.” Cried one: “I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now.”

This is Lewis’s fictional way of representing the “new heavens and new earth” promised in Scripture. As we conclude this month’s study of “Spiritual Geography: Mountains and Valleys in Scripture,” it’s appropriate to do so on a note of praise.

Like us, creation groans under the weight of sin and “its bondage to decay” (Rom. 8:19–22). Like us, it will one day celebrate its redemption. In the

meantime, it gives witness to its Creator and joins us in worship (see Ps. 19:1–4).

Psalm 98 summons nature to join the congregation in singing. The sea and all creatures in it are invited to “resound,” the rivers to “clap their hands,” and the mountains to “sing together for joy” (vv. 7–8). This jubilation is warranted because God is coming “to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity” (v. 9).

This month, we’ve seen that God is sovereign over all geographies—mountains, valleys, and everything in between. Mountains in Scripture are often a special place to meet God, and His justice and faithfulness are often evident in the valleys. Through this study, we hope you’ve gained a renewed appreciation for God’s presence in every place and every stage of life.

APPLY THE WORD

What lessons has the Lord taught you through this month’s devotions? What truths has He shown you about Himself and His Word? As you reflect and pray over these questions, also praise Him for the answers! “Shout for joy, you heavens; rejoice, you earth; burst into song, you mountains! For the LORD comforts his people” (Isa. 49:13).

PRAY WITH US

Thank you for your partnership in prayer with us this month! As we come to the end of this study, let us thank God for His work in every human life, in the valleys and on the mountains. Thank Him that His grace is always sufficient.

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