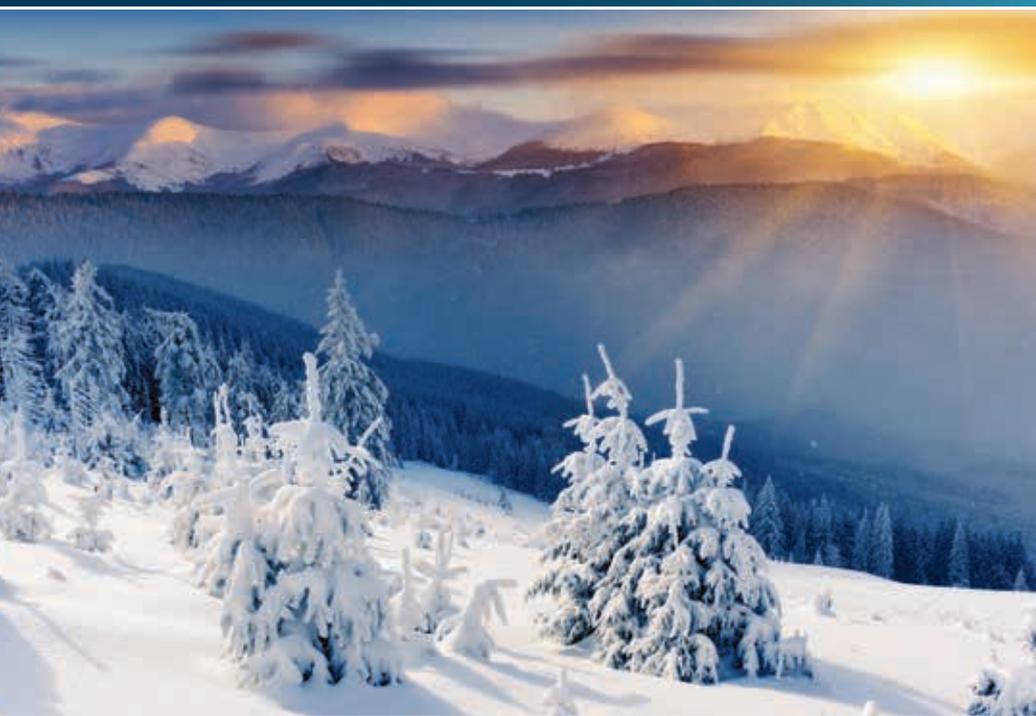


JANUARY 2017

# TODAY IN THE WORD™



*When they cried out to the LORD,  
he raised up for them a deliverer.*

Judges 3:9

## THE HAND OF SALVATION: Divine Rescue in Judges and Ruth

A devotional from



MOODY  
GLOBAL MINISTRIES

# TODAY WITH DR. PAUL NYQUIST

President of Moody Global Ministries

## The Battle Is the Lord's



I grew up in the Midwest, and I have not been to many battle sites from the Civil War. But I have been to Gettysburg, Pa., where the Union

and Confederate armies battled for three harrowing days in 1863.

Today, you can stand on Little Round Top hill and imagine the bayonet fighting in the thick trees by the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine soldiers, led by military commander Joshua Chamberlain. You can walk across Cemetery Ridge and picture Pickett's Charge right into the teeth of the Union soldiers. You can also envision the bodies strewn across the battlefield at the end of the fighting. With over 50,000 casualties, it was the bloodiest battle in U.S. history.

The Battle of Gettysburg turned the tide of the Civil War, with consequences that reverberated throughout the history of the nation. Some 150 years later, we can study these events to see more clearly what mistakes were made and what choices secured a victory.

The same is true in the book of Judges. Page after page is filled with records of fierce battles between the nation of Israel and their surrounding enemies.

Judges covers the nation's turbulent history as God's people tried to settle in their land.

But it is also a record of the mistakes made by God's people—most of which happened off the battlefield. Despite God's faithful and miraculous provision, the Israelites continued to disobey His commands and grumble at the results. Those actions had consequences. Judges 6:1 tells us, "The sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD gave them into the hands of Midian seven years."

Their only success came after God sent a deliverer. No matter how well we prepare or how sure we are of victory, the battle is always the Lord's. Every true success has only one source: the provision of our sovereign God.

The real story in the book of Judges is not Israel's military victories or defeats. The real Hero of this story is the Almighty God they served. The same is true in the story of our lives. We can easily be tempted to think we control circumstances through our strategic planning. We can try to orchestrate events so they line up in our favor. "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the LORD of hosts" (Zech. 4:6). The battle is indeed the Lord's. ■

# THEOLOGY MATTERS

by Dr. John Koessler

## The Ministry of the Spirit in the Days of the Judges

One notable feature of the book of Judges is the repeated pattern of Israel's disobedience followed by divine discipline and subsequent deliverance. This pattern is not like a natural cycle, such as the waxing and waning of the moon or the flow of the tides. Rather, Judges records Israel's spiritual decline through this catalog of disobedience, repentance, and forgiveness. The ultimate cause of this downward spiral is reflected in this refrain: "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit" (Judges 17:6; 21:25).

Yet when Israel cried out to God for help, He sent leaders to deliver them. These leaders succeeded not only because of their military prowess but also because of their faith as a result of the power of God's Spirit (see Heb. 11:32; Judges 6:34; 11:29; 14:6, 19; 15:14). Many of these heroes were flawed. Gideon struggled with fear and doubt. Jephthah was rash. Samson was self-centered and sensual. How could people of such inconsistent character be used by the Holy Spirit? In part, this is explained by the distinctive nature of the Holy Spirit's ministry in the Old Testament. He came upon select individuals for a limited period of time, enabling them to accomplish particular tasks for God. In contrast, Jesus promised His disciples that the Holy

Spirit would be in them permanently (John 14:16–17).

Theologian Charles Ryrie describes the Holy Spirit's ministry during the Old Testament era this way: "It was a general ministry to the nation which other peoples did not enjoy, but indwelling of all individuals within that one nation was not a part of that ministry." This describes an important difference with the Holy Spirit's ministry to the church. According to Romans 8:9, the Holy Spirit indwells everyone who belongs to Christ. The Holy Spirit is Christ's gift to the church. He unites us to Christ and joins us to one another. He equips us with spiritual gifts that we use to serve the church. He gives us the ability to say no to the sinful nature and to overcome the power of sin. The Holy Spirit bears witness within our spirit that we belong to Christ (Rom. 8:16).

The Holy Spirit carried out a dynamic ministry to the nation of Israel during the Old Testament era. But His ministry to those who are in Christ is even more remarkable. He is our guarantee that God will complete the work He has begun in us (Eph. 1:14). ■

### FOR FURTHER STUDY

To learn more about the Holy Spirit's ministry, read *The Holy Spirit* by Charles C. Ryrie (Moody).

# FROM THE EDITORS

by Bruce Everhart

## I Am Resolved

January is the month when many people make New Year's resolutions—even though almost all of us are aware that we will probably fail to keep them. It is difficult to create new and healthier habits, even for the most resolved among us.

In his best-selling business book, *The Power of Habit*, Charles Duhigg describes how habits are created. He examines why we have trouble breaking bad habits and explores the life-changing power of good ones. He cites a Duke University researcher who discovered that over 40 percent of the actions we perform each day happen out of habits, not conscious decisions.

What are your habits? Would you like to establish a new habit of faithfully studying God's Word? At *Today in the Word*, we hope we can help you to cultivate the discipline of spending time with God and meditating on His Word.

Puritan preacher Jonathan Edwards wrote a famous series of resolutions that he would read once a week. As we begin another year of *Today in the Word* together, I think you will appreciate Edwards' resolution #28. Maybe, you will even adopt it as one of your own.

*#28: Resolved, to study the Scriptures so steadily, constantly and frequently, as that I may find, and plainly perceive myself to grow in the knowledge of the same.*

Steady. Constant. Frequent. These are excellent adjectives to apply to the discipline of spending time in God's Word. As we steadily, constantly, and frequently meditate on the truth found in God's Word, it has a way of shaping our lives.

While we may worry about our own ability to keep resolutions, we can be reassured that God has promised to complete His work in us. Even Jonathan Edwards acknowledged his weakness and reliance on God when he added, "being sensible that I am unable to do anything without God's help."

Isn't it good to know that we are not in this alone? In Philippians 1:6, Paul writes, "Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." As we begin 2017, may you grow in the study of God's Word and be encouraged to know that He will carry out His will for you. Together, let's make a "good habit" of spending regular time in the Word. ■

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# TODAY IN THE WORD™

## The Hand of Salvation: Divine Rescue in Judges and Ruth

The Sistine Chapel is filled with art and tapestries created by some of the greatest artists in history, including Botticelli, Raphael, and Perugino. But the indisputable masterpiece is the ceiling, which is covered by frescoes painted by Michelangelo. In the center panel, Michelangelo placed *The Creation of Adam*. God reaches out from heaven to impart life to His new creation of humanity. And in the center of this painting is the hand of God.

The hand of God is also central to the stories told in the books of Judges and Ruth. Throughout the depressing cycles of sin, oppression, and misery, God's hand remains ready to deliver His people. He uses flawed men and women to accomplish His flawless plans. And in the midst of the darkness, He is still working to provide our ultimate deliverance from sin: Ruth and Boaz have a son who will be the ancestor of King David, from whose line our Savior Jesus Christ will be born.

As we study the books of Judges and Ruth this month, we pray that God will encourage your heart to see where His hand is working in your life today. Through these divinely inspired stories of His deliverance we are reminded that our God sees, hears, cares for, and rescues His people. We are grateful to join with you on this journey of growing closer to the Lord through the study of His Word, and may we see His hand more clearly and praise Him for His mighty salvation. ■

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SUNDAY  
JANUARY

1

*“Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,” says the LORD Almighty.*

Zechariah 4:6

## The Battle Belongs to the Lord

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of this month, a new American president will move into the White House and assume responsibility for governing the country. During the inauguration, the president will lay a hand on the Bible and swear, with God’s help, to uphold the Constitution.

In ancient Israel, political power was transferred after a leader’s death. In fact, every time a leader’s death is announced in the Old Testament, it signals an important historical moment. The book of Judges begins with the announcement that Moses’ successor, Joshua, is dead. (Similarly, the book of Joshua begins with the announcement of Moses’ death.) In contrast to the book of Joshua, however, in Judges, no appointed leader fills the vacancy. The motley crew of Israelite tribes assemble to finish the task given to them by Moses, by Joshua, and most importantly, by God: conquer the Promised Land and inhabit it.

From our reading today, the Israelites seem inclined to do Yahweh’s will. The text offers signs of national strength and spiritual vitality, not least that the military campaign is preceded by a prayer meeting; notice that the story begins with the phrase, “The Israelites asked the LORD” (v. 1). God’s people understood that the battle belongs to the Lord and must be fought according to His time and methods. They knew they had to depend on His power and His Spirit.

The Israelites sought God, and this resulted in success. Judah, in partnership with the tribe of Simeon, attacked the Canaanites in three strategic locations: the hill country, the Negev, and the western foothills (v. 9). In city after city, they were given the victory promised by God, reaping the reward of obeying and depending on Him.

### APPLY THE WORD

This month we will see the surprising salvation of our faithful God for His unfaithful people. There can be no doubt that salvation, in the book of Judges and for us today, is God’s work and the glory belongs to Him alone. But surprisingly, God works His divine will through fallible, human hands. Will we obey Him and ask Him to guide us?

### PRAY WITH US

On this first day of 2017, we invite the readers of *Today in the Word* to pray that our study of the Bible this year will give us deeper understanding of God’s Word and draw us closer to Christ.

*Remember well what the LORD your God did to  
Pharaoh and to all Egypt.*

Deuteronomy 7:18

MONDAY  
JANUARY

2

## Failure Belongs to Israel

*One if by land, two if by sea.* Poet Henry W. Longfellow coined this phrase to describe the historic night when Paul Revere rode from Boston to Concord, warning the American patriots that British troops were advancing. Paul Revere's ride is one story important to American national identity. It is the kind of story that tells us who we are.

Ancient Israel had a far more spectacular story to tell about their identity as God's people. They had been slaves in Egypt, but God had miraculously rescued them by bringing plagues upon their captors and parting the Red Sea. Their story of rescue was intended to be rehearsed and retold to future generations; their deliverance was meant to inspire unshakeable confidence in God. This story should lead Israel out of fear and into obedient worship.

As we see in today's reading, Israel failed their holy task of storytelling.

They did not remember the wondrous works performed on their behalf. Instead, they told different stories—stories that described the Canaanite chariots as invincible, stories that exaggerated the fierce determination of the Canaanites to hold fast to their land. They diminished the power of the God of Israel, the God who had promised the land to them.

Neglecting the holy act of memory, Israel fell into a crisis of confidence that quickly became a failure of obedience. Though Judges 1 ends with what could be perceived as military success, they did not conquer land and its people in the way God had commanded. Instead of driving the Canaanites out of the land, they made fatal compromises, allowing the Canaanites to live among them as a slave labor force. Old Testament scholar Dale Ralph Davis describes the ending of this chapter as the Israelite “pragmatic success and spiritual failure.”

### APPLY THE WORD

We have a story just as Israel did: Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. We were delivered not from a foreign oppressor but from the sting of sin and death. As the apostle Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 15, our story is meant to make us the kind of people who stand firm, always giving ourselves fully to the work of the Lord (v. 58).

### PRAY WITH US

As we look forward to the beginning of the new semester on January 9, please pray for Moody's president, Dr. Paul Nyquist. Ask the Lord to give him strength, joy, and perseverance in the new season of Moody Global Ministries.

TUESDAY  
JANUARY

3

*The LORD, the compassionate and gracious God,  
slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.*

Exodus 34:6

## God's Mercy for Israel's Misery

Today's parents are being coached to correct their children "positively." Positive parenting is defined as a gentle form of guidance by which parents seek to avoid harsh methods of punishment, looking instead to nurture the child's self-esteem and enforce logical, natural consequences for bad behavior.

Punishment may seem like a primitive notion, but our passage today reveals God's willingness to punish His wayward people. But punishment is not the final word in Judges. In fact, we learn that God is far more merciful and gracious than expected or deserved.

The book of Judges describes the cycle of Israel's misery and God's mercy. God's people abandon Him and worship other gods. They break the covenant. Their shortcuts to obedience (such as forcing the Canaanites into slavery rather than destroying them completely) have not made their lives

any easier. In fact, their sin is to blame for their misery. God brought harsh consequences upon His children for their sin, and they were "sold into the hands" of their enemies (2:14). But if sin and judgment compose the brooding melodies of Judges, the book always returns to a coda of mercy. God won't abandon His people.

In the descriptions of both of Israel's punishment and Israel's rescue, we see the theme of the hand of salvation. Salvation is first, finally, and fully God's work, and in the book of Judges He works out His divine plan using the human hands of Othniel, Ehud, Barak, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson (among others). He also uses a human hand to unleash judgment: the kings of Mesopotamia, Moab, Canaan, Midian, and Philistine. The hand of the Lord is active in Israel's history, sovereignly working through human agents to accomplish His purposes.

### APPLY THE WORD

In this book, the heroes aren't the judges—the hero is God, whose mercy meets Israel's misery, both when they are broken and contrite and when they are not. As we learn today, God has bound himself to His own promise: "I will never break my covenant with you" (2:1). What encouragement do His constant mercies give you today?

### PRAY WITH US

We thank God today for the contribution of the Business Manager department's Duane Koenig, Gregory Miller, Michael Davis, and Stephen Gemeiner to the increase of the ministry of Moody Publishers. Please include their service in your prayers.

*But when they cried out to the LORD, he raised up  
for them a deliverer.*

Judges 3:9

WEDNESDAY  
JANUARY

4

## A Few Good Men: Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar

William Kyle Carpenter, age 21, is the youngest American soldier to receive the Medal of Honor. When serving a tour of duty in Afghanistan, Carpenter threw himself on top of a hand grenade in order to shield his fellow soldier from the explosion. His bravery cost him his right eye, most of his teeth, a broken jaw, and multiple fractures in his arm. Carpenter's action demonstrated that he was a hero.

We usually know a military hero by his or her exemplary bravery and self-sacrifice. Yet these and other heroic qualities, like impressive physical stature and strength, are strangely absent from the description of the deliverers in Judges 3. In our reading today, we meet the first three judges: Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar. None is exceptionally bright or brave. In fact, very little personal detail is offered about these three men whom God used to deliver His people.

We know that Othniel is related to Caleb, who, along with Joshua, had brought back a faithful report of the Promised Land to the people of Israel (cf. Num. 13:25–33). We know that Ehud was left-handed (or perhaps ambidextrous, as some commentators argue). And we know even less about Shamgar, who was likely not an Israelite, except that he could expertly wield an oxgoad, an ancient farming implement.

The personal profile of each of these deliverers stands at the background of the biblical story. As readers, we don't sense that they are being commended to us as examples to follow. Instead, at the foreground of the action is God: He raises up a few good men to deliver Israel from distress; His Spirit empowers Othniel; He delivers a fatal message to King Eglon by Ehud; through His power, Shamgar "saved Israel" (v. 31). God used these men to rescue His people, but they weren't the heroes—God is.

### APPLY THE WORD

Judges does not tell Israel's story chronologically but thematically, focusing on Israel's sin, punishment and pleas, deliverance, and temporary peace. Notice as we read further that elements of the formula disappear, signaling their increasing moral dissolution. May we be encouraged to repent and turn away from our own sin!

### PRAY WITH US

Today, please uphold in prayer our chief financial officer, Ken Heullitt. We appreciate Ken's and his teams' role and responsibilities in managing Moody's finances. We'll continue praying for them in the next two days.

THURSDAY  
JANUARY

5

*Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is part of it.*

1 Corinthians 12:27

## Partnered for a Purpose: Deborah, Barak, Jael

Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote America's bestselling novel of the nineteenth century, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The novel had such political importance that when meeting Stowe during the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln is reported to have said, "So this is the little woman who made this big war."

Our reading from the book of Judges today centers on a "little woman" who ended a big war: Jael. It's not clear, however, that Jael is the deliverer whom God has raised up to save Israel. In the previous chapter, the author included narrative clues like "The Spirit of the LORD came on [Othniel]," and "he gave them a deliverer—Ehud," and Shamgar "saved Israel" to help readers identify the divinely appointed deliverer (3:10, 15, 31). But such explicit affirmations are omitted in Judges 5. This signals that God's rescue operation has not just one protagonist but three: Deborah, whose prophetic and judiciary

roles are important; Barak, who leads the Israelites army into battle; and Jael, the courageous housewife.

Based on Deborah's prophetic utterance—that a woman, not Barak, would have enjoyed battle honors—the case could be made that Jael was Israel's real deliverer (v. 9). (The author of the book of Hebrews notes Barak's importance in Heb. 11:32). The text doesn't miss the irony of what happened: Jael's hospitality was her weapon of war. She welcomed Sisera into her tent, covered him with a blanket, and gave him milk to drink. She communicated safety while plotting his death, ending his life with an ordinary household item: a tent peg.

But even after noting Jael's courage, the author again returns to real victor: it is the Lord who gave Sisera into Israel's hands (vv. 14, 23).

### APPLY THE WORD

Together, Deborah, Barak, and Jael worked for Israel's deliverance. That should remind us of the collaborative nature of God's kingdom work. As the body of Christ, we must partner together to accomplish God's purposes. We each have gifts and a role to play in working out His good purposes (see 1 Cor. 12:12–31).

### PRAY WITH US

Andrea Palmer-Reed, Daphne Hussey, Marilou Logan, Rohan McLachlan, and Tonya Reed serve in Investment Accounting on our Chicago campus. Would you pray for them as they provide quality investment services that meet the needs of Moody's donors?

*Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly . . . through psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit.*

Colossians 3:16

FRIDAY  
JANUARY

6

## A Song of Triumph: The Lord and His People

Author of more than 28 books of poetry, Juan Felipe Herrera was the 2015 U.S. poet laureate. When Herrera talks about poetry’s importance, he doesn’t name its ability to teach. Instead, he describes poetry’s capacity for conveying beauty. He uses words like choreography. He calls a poem “a choir on the page.”

In our reading today, we have the poetic version of Israel’s battle against Canaan, described in chapter 4. Occasionally Scripture will record a historical event as both prose and poetry. Another example of this is from Exodus 14 and 15, which includes both a prosaic account of the crossing of the Red Sea and a song of praise that Moses and the Israelites sang to the Lord. The differences between prose and poetry are well known. Prose usually offers a linear accounting of events, while poetry takes liberty to excite the imagination. Note, for

example, that our poetic account of the battle in today’s reading includes a scene of Sisera’s mother wondering anxiously about his delay in returning home (vv. 28–30).

In Judges 5, Deborah and Barak celebrated God’s victory in poetic verse and song. But they also mention the human characters who participated in the drama of divine rescue. They also give praise for the willingness of God’s people to offer themselves to Him (v. 2). In poetic parallelism, Deborah and Barak recite “the victories of the LORD, the victories of his villagers in Israel” (v. 11), reminding us that God’s work does not eliminate human responsibility. In fact, we can praise God not only for His victory but also for the willing obedience of His servants like Jael, whose hand was used by God for securing salvation (v. 26).

### APPLY THE WORD

Ancient Israel used singing as part of worship. And they didn’t just sing *about* the Lord and His works. They sang *to* the Lord, addressing their praise to Him. As today’s key verse reminds us, we are commanded to sing songs. What important part does music play in your spiritual life throughout the week—and not just on Sundays?

### PRAY WITH US

Barry Cole, Jeffery Knapp, James Chadwick, and Trevor McCarter from the Investments department manage a wide range of assets and funds on behalf of Moody. Please pray for wisdom, discernment, and clear understanding of today’s market.

*Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid . . . for the LORD your God will be with you.*

Joshua 1:9

## The Call of the Cowardly: Gideon

Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. were both born in the 1920s to Baptist preachers, and both longed to see an end to systemic injustice. But Malcolm X, an advocate of Black nationalism, supported militant solutions, while Martin Luther King Jr. adhered to principles of nonviolence.

When people are oppressed, they understandably want deliverance. It's quite possible that the Israelites did not cheer the coming of the peaceable prophet of God (vv. 7–10). They wanted someone to bear the sword, not simply preach the word of God. But the prophet's message was an important one for Israel to heed. He reminded God's people that their rescue from Egypt was God's claim on their loyalty. God had rescued them for obedience, not idolatry.

We're not told whether the prophet's brimstone sermon had a measurable

effect, but God, in His mercy, did not stop with one prophet. He brought Gideon on the scene to bear the sword against the oppressive Midianites, Amalekites, and other eastern peoples, whose swarming presence mimicked the locusts of the Egyptian plague (see Exodus 10). Clearly, Gideon was not chosen by God for his admirable qualities. We first see him threshing wheat in a winepress, cowering from foreign oppressors. He embraced his call with great reluctance, needing tangible reassurances from God that He would be with him. Nor does Gideon seem particularly pious, for while he had a vague understanding of the God of Israel who delivered His people from Egypt, his family had built and maintained a shrine to Baal.

Israel would not be saved by Gideon because of his own merits. They would only be delivered because God chose to send him.

### APPLY THE WORD

When the angel of God calls Gideon a “mighty warrior,” the irony is that Gideon is not mighty but cowardly (v. 12)! But doesn't this tell us something? God calls us not on the basis of who we are but because of who He intends us to become. What has God called you to do for Him? Just as He did with Gideon, the Lord will enable you to serve Him.

### PRAY WITH US

Would you put on your prayer list Stephen Mogck, Moody's executive VP and chief operating officer? Please pray for the Holy Spirit's leading as he and his teams seek to serve Moody's ministries with excellence.

*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*

2 Corinthians 12:9

SUNDAY  
JANUARY

8

## The Call of the Few: Gideon and His Army

The weapons of warfare have changed dramatically over the millennia. From hand-to-hand combat with crude implements to the development of firearms to nuclear weapons and military drones, humanity continually devises new ways to gain a military advantage against the enemy.

By all accounts, ancient Israel certainly did not have a military advantage. When warfare was conducted by hand-to-hand combat, having fewer people meant the odds would be nearly insurmountable.

The Midianites, Amalekites, and other eastern people had an infantry as thick as locusts (v. 12). Israel's army, whittled by God to a meager 300, was vastly outnumbered (vv. 7–8). More than that, the foreign oppressors had the advantage of a camel cavalry, and every soldier was armed with a sword. By contrast, the Israelite army was a poorly

equipped militia, bearing not swords but trumpets, empty jars, and torches.

Why would God deliberately stack the deck against His people in this way? Didn't reducing their odds only frighten the already timid Gideon? But of course it was exactly God's intention to destroy the idea that this battle could be fought or won by human skill or savvy. His complaint that Gideon had "too many men" (v. 4) reminds us that the impossible odds in this story have one purpose: to preserve God's glory. God will not share His glory with Gideon, nor will He share it with Gideon's army. It must be clear to them, and indeed to all of the Israelites, that God alone had saved His people.

The final battle cry of Gideon's regiment reminds us that the odds are never as impossible as they seem. Gideon and his men didn't need swords, not when God planned to use Midianite ones!

### APPLY THE WORD

Where we see impossibility, God sees miracle. This is why the apostle Paul delighted in his weaknesses, claiming that God's power was made perfect in them. Whether your weakness is a physical limitation, an economic disadvantage, or a paralyzing fear, what would it look like to begin trusting that God could use it to glorify Himself?

### PRAY WITH US

We value the dedicated service of Moody's Custodial team! As they take care of our campus in Chicago, please pray for Cathy Sywulka, Danielle Hooper, Danny Hutcherson, David Boskovic, and Dean Gentry.

MONDAY  
JANUARY

9

*To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.*

1 Samuel 15:22

## Compromise and Corruption: Gideon and His Ephod

When Illinois Republicans nominated Abraham Lincoln to run for the U.S. Senate, he gave his notable “House Divided” speech. “I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free,” Lincoln said. “I do not expect the Union to be dissolved, I do not expect the house to fall, but I do expect it will cease to be divided.” Lincoln understood the fragility of a nation that was divided on core beliefs.

As we discussed earlier, one telltale sign of Israel’s growing moral dissolution throughout the book of Judges is its increasing disunity. In today’s reading, this fragmentation becomes apparent after Gideon’s victory over Midian. Though Israel should have been celebrating Yahweh’s victory over the oppressors—a rout that sent Midian scuttling back over the Jordan River—instead they were squabbling over bragging rights. The tribe of Ephraim wanted to know why they

were excluded from battle (v. 1). And Gideon, rather than recounting that God Himself had whittled his army and delivered the victory, tried instead to soothe the Ephraimite egos (v. 3). When Gideon looked for help from Sukkoth and Peniel and asked for bread for his weary, hungry soldiers, he was refused, a betrayal that he later avenged with torture and death (vv. 5, 17).

Israel’s twelve tribes hung together by fragile threads of loyalty. Some leaders proposed to make Gideon king. Gideon refused, and at first glance he appears to give pious reasons for his reluctance to accept the crown: “The LORD will rule over you” (v. 23). But this was actually a shield for his own selfishness, and Gideon chose compromise over holiness. In a scene reminiscent of the Israelite worship of the golden calf, the people collected an offering to make an idol—this time, for an ephod, or priestly garment (vv. 22–27; see Exodus 32).

### APPLY THE WORD

Neither the golden calf nor the golden ephod was presented as a different god. Both Aaron and Gideon offered idols as symbols of Yahweh worship; perhaps the people reasoned that they weren’t rejecting God outright but making worship a little bit easier. We should beware when pragmatism is elevated above obedience to God.

### PRAY WITH US

Custodians Do Tran, Edgardo Bartolome, Ernest Brown, John Pettett, and John Williams work hard to make Moody’s Chicago campus a pleasant and welcoming environment for our students, faculty, staff, and guests. They will appreciate your prayers.

*Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant.*

Matthew 20:26

TUESDAY  
JANUARY

10

## The Boast of Bramble: Abimelek

Traditionally, the First Lady of the United States adopts a cause to which she devotes attention and energy during her husband's tenure as President. Lucy Hayes promoted the temperance movement, Lady Bird Johnson provided support for the Highway Beautification Act, and Nancy Reagan encouraged children to "Just Say No" to drug use.

In our reading, Abimelek enjoyed a degree of prestige and influence due to his family relationships—but he chose not to wield it for good. Though his father, Gideon, had refused the kingship, he still enjoyed what seemed to be royal privileges. Gideon had a vast number of wives and concubines and used his golden ephod to exercise undue national influence. Little wonder, then, that after Gideon died, Abimelek, the son of one of Gideon's concubines, sought to maneuver the leadership role for himself (vv. 1–2).

The only obstacle to Abimelek's political ambitions was his birth story. His mother was originally from Shechem and had likely been offered in marriage to Gideon by her male relatives in hopes of forming a political alliance. As a concubine who probably entered the marriage with little dowry, Gideon's mother did not enjoy the full status of a wife, and her second-class status cast disrepute on Abimelek. But cunningly, Abimelek solved this problem with capital execution, putting to death all but one of Gideon's seventy sons (v. 5).

Lawlessness reigned Israel, and the text reminds us that the rest enjoyed by the land in Israel during Gideon's lifetime (see 8:28) would end. According to Jotham's prophecy, we cannot expect anything but a short, violent reign from the thornbush king, who will be destroyed in the process of destroying (vv. 14–20).

### APPLY THE WORD

The true test of leadership is not brute strength or cunning strategy. Instead, as we read in our key verse, Jesus says that true leadership requires humility. If you want to lead, serve. This challenges our sense of entitlement. Good leaders don't exercise their privilege. They lay it down for the good of those following behind.

### PRAY WITH US

As we conclude our prayer time for Moody's Custodial Services, please add Nicole Lee, Oakley Smith, Paul Henle, and Thomas Pizano to your prayer list. Everybody who comes to Moody in Chicago sees the results of their excellent work.

WEDNESDAY  
JANUARY

11

*God is our refuge and strength,  
an ever-present help in trouble.*

Psalm 46:1

## Death by Division: Abimelek

The field of Christian comedy has grown in the past three decades. Stand-up comedians such as Tim Hawkins and Jeanne Robertson fill auditoriums, Christian satirical news websites like *The Babylon Bee* draw tens of thousands of readers, and Anita Renfro’s video of “William Tell Momisms” went viral with over 1.2 million views.

Humor can be an important communication tool, and Judges provides us with several examples of divinely inspired comedy. For instance, King Eglon’s embarrassingly long bathroom break in chapter 3 is a piece of slapstick that highlights how ridiculous it is to oppose God. And in today’s reading, we clearly see use of literary irony, which exposes just how far the Israelites have fallen from faithful obedience to Yahweh.

As a first example, the Midianites and the Canaanites had been subdued and their marauding campaigns halted, but

the Shechemites picked up where they left off. They rob and ambush their own (v. 25). Now the terror of Israel is . . . Israel! Further, Gaal—a man of outsider status (just like Abimelek)—moved into Shechem and slyly persuaded the people to follow him. But whom does he suggest as his political hero? Hamor, who was the father of the young prince, Shechem (vv. 26–28). To understand how shocking this is, remember that Shechem raped Jacob’s daughter, Dinah, and later begged his father, Hamor, to procure her to be his wife (see Genesis 34). Hamor, the father of and colluder with the rapist Shechem, is hardly an improvement on the murderer Abimelek!

Finally, in another example of dramatic irony, the people of Shechem took refuge from Abimelek in Baal’s temple—and there they died. Baal was not the god whom people could call their “refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble” (Ps. 46:1).

### APPLY THE WORD

Where have you turned for refuge and strength? The world says we find safety in wealth or professional networking. We can be tempted to put our trust in leaders or worldly answers that lead to destruction. But God will never fail us. He does not promise an easy life free from pain, but He does promise to be with us (see Psalm 23).

### PRAY WITH US

Please thank God today for the ministry of Moody’s Stewardship department headed by vice president Jim Elliott. We thank God for their team spirit and for all their consistent outreach to Moody’s donors.

*Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. . . . As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.*

Joshua 24:15

THURSDAY  
JANUARY

12

## God's Impatient Mercy: The Rescue that Doesn't Fail

The “non-apology apology” has become standard practice in public scandals. Even people caught telling lies, perpetrating massive corruption, or engaging in sexual deviance rarely acknowledge the wrongness of their actions and ask for forgiveness. Instead of repentance, we're more likely to hear, “Mistakes were made” or “I'm sorry if anyone was offended.”

As we've read through the book of Judges to this point, Israel had always readily acknowledged their misery—they have cried out to the Lord—but they had not readily admitted their mistakes, much less their sin. Hebrew scholars have noted that the verb translated as “to cry out” does not necessarily imply the admission of sin and repentance. Finally, in chapter 10, for the first time in this narrative Israel acknowledged their offense against God. We see finally clear evidence of repentance.

Besides crying out to the Lord because they are experiencing the oppression of foreign armies, Israel also put away their foreign gods. For the first time in this account of their cycles of sin and deliverance, they recognized the nature of true worship: we must choose whom we will serve. The Lord God will not tolerate rivals for our praise.

Israel didn't merely feel sad about having worshiped idols. This repentance wasn't merely a matter of salty tears of regret. This repentance is active, decisive.

We should be clear that it is not Israel's repentance that moves God to mercy. Throughout the book, God has acted to deliver Israel not because they were repentant but because He is gracious. God shows mercy because it is His nature to bridle His righteous anger—He becomes “impatient” over the misery of His people (v. 16, ESV).

### APPLY THE WORD

Few of us find it easy to confess our sins, even privately in prayer. We might regret the sin and its consequences, but repentance requires us to face the truth about our sin: It is a violation against God's holiness. Thankfully, He promises both forgiveness and the power to choose godliness (see 1 John 1:9; 2 Tim. 1:7).

### PRAY WITH US

Would you mention in your prayers today Moody's vice president of Student Life, Dr. Tim Arens? Please pray for the Holy Spirit's leading as he and his team seek to serve our students on Moody's Chicago campus.

FRIDAY  
JANUARY

13

*The weakness of God is stronger  
than human strength.*

1 Corinthians 1:25

## Outsider Status: Jephthah

In her essay “When I Was a Child,” Marilynne Robinson explores the role of the “outsider” in American literature. “In [Walt] Whitman the outsider is the visionary. In Thoreau he is the critic. In the . . . tradition of Western myth he is a rescuer and avenger.” In the book of Judges, the outsider has an important role to play: the role of deliverer.

Notice the outsider qualities of the men and women cited so far in God’s story of rescue in Judges. (Othniel, the first deliverer mentioned in chapter 3, is the exception to this rule.) Ehud was left-handed. Shamgar was a Gentile. Deborah, Jael, and Abimelek’s assassin were women. Gideon was the weakest member of his family, and his family was the weakest clan of Israel. And finally, we arrive at Jephthah, son of a prostitute and outcast of Gilead.

In Judges, God delights to use the most unexpected people to deliver Israel. In

His wisdom, He uses the hand of the weak, not the strong; the hand of the powerless, not the powerful; the hand of the outsider, not the insider. Divine “foolishness” is greater than human wisdom, divine “weakness” greater than human strength.

In our introduction to Jephthah, we immediately notice similarities to the scoundrel Abimelek. Jephthah’s pedigree, as the son of a prostitute, is less than savory (v. 1). And, as if to confirm his outsider status, he has banded with a group of good-for-nothings (v. 3). But Jephthah did not vie for power; he negotiated for the more influential position of “head” rather than “commander,” rather than consolidating his rule by murdering his rivals (v. 9). And unlike Abimelek, who never expressed allegiance to the God of Israel, Jephthah sought to make the Lord a witness to his commissioning (v. 11).

### APPLY THE WORD

Perhaps you’ve been estranged from your family, relocated to new place, or marginalized by dominant cultural values. Take heart from the story of Jephthah! God doesn’t require a royal pedigree or fame or fortune! Ask the Lord how you can serve Him where you are with the abilities He has given you, and trust in His strength to work through you.

### PRAY WITH US

Please uphold in prayer Moody’s trustees as they lend their talents, time, and efforts to Moody Global Ministries. We are grateful for their leadership and we pray for strength, health, and God’s protection for both them and their families.

*Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty  
in your heart to utter anything before God.*

Ecclesiastes 5:2

SATURDAY  
JANUARY

14

## The Curse of Hasty Words: Jephthah's Daughter

In 2004 the Metropolitan Museum of Art reconstructed the tomb of Perneb, replacing the discolored protective glass over its limestone carvings and reconfiguring its entrance. Now visitors are able to see how ancient Egyptians buried their dead and which objects they considered necessary for the afterlife. We can learn much about what Egyptian families valued by what they chose to put in the tomb as well as what they chose to omit.

As careful readers of Judges, we can learn a great deal by examining the text. What details are included? What is left out? What details proved to be most necessary to this story? Understanding what is left unsaid in the book of Judges can be as important as what is explicitly stated in helping us understand what Scripture considers valuable.

Today's reading about Jephthah omits some key information that we've seen

in earlier accounts in Judges. In the story of Sisera's death, for example, the text describes in detail the ironic hospitality offered by Jael. In the story of Gideon, attention is paid to Gideon's fear and God's reassurances. Both stories provide ample military details. Jephthah's story, however, includes no clear mention of his call from God, and no language of God raising up a savior/deliverer. Little airtime is devoted to the battle between the Ammonites and Israelites. And we don't even know the name of Jephthah's daughter, the victim of his rash vow!

The divinely inspired biblical text certainly could have included these details. Their absence highlights that the spiritual condition of Israel had spiraled further. Women are no longer named but victimized. Jephthah seems to have a murky understanding of God; even the deliverer of Israel ends up condemning his own child to death.

### APPLY THE WORD

It's helpful to remember three things when studying the story of Jephthah. First, every human person is a bag of mixed motives and compromised intentions. Second, God isn't using morally upright people in Judges, and that's the whole point. Finally, what the Bible records isn't necessarily what the Bible recommends.

### PRAY WITH US

Pray semester has started on all Moody campuses. Let's spend time in prayer for our undergraduate and graduate students. Ask the Holy Spirit to work in their hearts throughout the semester and to give them guidance and encouragement.

# QUESTION AND ANSWER

by Dr. Michael Rydelnik, Professor of Jewish Studies and *Open Line* Host



**Where did Cain get his wife?**

**A** After Cain murdered his brother, Abel, the Lord disciplined him by making him “a restless wanderer on the earth” (Gen. 4:12). Nevertheless, God showed Cain grace in the midst of judgment by placing “a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him” (Gen. 4:15). Cain then settled “in the land of Nod, east of Eden,” married, and had a son (Gen. 4:16–17).

If Cain was one of only three sons born to Adam and Eve, where did Cain find this wife? And a related question is who else existed who would potentially want to kill him?

The answer lies in the nature in biblical storytelling, called narrative. One characteristic of the narrative of Scripture is that it is intentionally selective in the information it transmits. Biblical narrative tells only what needs to be known for the story. In the account of Cain and Abel, it was unnecessary to include a description of any other siblings. That does not mean, however, that Adam and Eve did not have other children, both male and female. Indeed, God’s command, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it,” means it

is likely that Adam and Eve had many more children than just the three whose names we are given (Gen. 1:28).

This explains both questions. First, Cain likely feared that his brothers (and possibly also nephews) would want to kill him to avenge the murder of their brother Abel. Thus, God marked Cain to protect him. Second, Cain found a female descendant of Adam and Eve to marry. We don’t know how much time had elapsed since the eviction from the Garden of Eden or how many descendants of Adam and Eve now filled the world, but it seems like a clear conclusion from this text that the population was sufficient to provide Cain both an option to marry and a reason to fear.



**Since the Bible appears to support a pro-life position that requires God to be both the giver and taker of life, what does the Bible have to say about capital punishment? Doesn’t the Bible say, “Thou shalt not kill?”**

**A** The Scriptures do authorize capital punishment for intentional murder, what is categorized in the U.S. criminal justice system today as first-degree homicide. We see this divine authorization of capital punishment before the Law of Moses was given to Israel, in the

*It is likely that Adam and Eve had many more children than just the three whose names we are given.*

days just after the Flood: “Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed, for in the image of God has God made mankind” (Gen. 9:6). Murder is forbidden because of humanity’s high status as created in the image of God, and God declared that capital punishment is an appropriate penalty for anyone who intentionally takes the life of another person.

When the Law of Moses was given, Israel was commanded, “Anyone who strikes a person with a fatal blow is to be put to death” (Ex. 21:12). This is also supported in the New Testament, where human governments are granted divine authority to approve those who do good and to punish those who do wrong (see Rom. 13:1–7). Governmental authority can “bear the sword” (Rom. 13:4), a reference to capital punishment.

Some have objected that certain murderers in the Bible were not put to death. For example, Cain killed Abel but was not put to death (Gen. 4:1–16). But the ability and the authority to carry out capital punishment for murder do not mean that Scripture requires it to be implemented in every instance. In the case of Cain, for example, God might have been showing mercy to Adam, Cain’s father, who would have had to carry out the sentence.

Other objections to capital punishment are more philosophical in nature.

Some contend that taking the life of a murderer will send that person to hell. This is a misunderstanding of what determines our eternal destiny. The murderer’s sin and depravity separates him from God, not capital punishment. Moreover, some on death row have turned to God for forgiveness, and their sentence hastened repentance.

Others object that capital punishment does not work as a deterrent for other murderers. This may or may not be so, but it certainly is a deterrent for that particular murderer not to kill again.

Finally, some object that capital punishment is inhumane, not treating the murderer with human dignity. Actually, the opposite is true. Too often people attempt to offer excuses to explain their choice to end the life of someone else. But tolerating excuses minimizes human dignity. A government’s use of capital punishment says to the murderer, “You, as a person made in the image of God, sought to destroy that image in another person. Therefore, you must be punished.” God has ordained human governments to carry out capital punishment not as a means of demeaning or diminishing humanity, but because it upholds the dignity of humanity made in the image of God.

SUNDAY  
JANUARY

15

*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given.*

Isaiah 9:6

## To Us a Son Is Given: Samson

Despite his tepid attitude toward religion and faith, Renaissance painter Leonardo da Vinci loved to paint angels. When he was only 20 years old, Leonardo finished *The Annunciation*, begun by his master, Verrocchio. He worked on the angel Gabriel, whose wings some have said are an early prototype for Leonardo's later sketches of flying machines.

In today's reading, we have an annunciation scene, which occur throughout Scripture (for other examples, see 1 Samuel 1; Luke 1): An angel announces that a baby will be born. In Judges 13, it becomes clear that this baby, born to Manoah and his wife, is going to be a very special man whom God has set apart for his purposes. He will be a Nazirite.

Curiously, a Nazirite vow, which is explained in Numbers 6, was usually a voluntary vow undertaken for an

allotted period of time. It was used to enter a dedicated season of intentional holiness or consecration to God. People who swore a Nazirite vow gave up drinking and eating wine, grape juice, vinegar, or anything related to the grapevine. They also promised not to cut their hair or go near a dead body, even if during the vow a close family member died.

By contrast, the Nazirite vow that will be the binding promise of Samson's life is not taken by him (or even his parents) but pronounced by God. Moreover, it is not for a specified season of time but for the duration of his life, including the nine months of gestation in his mother's womb. Clearly, we are meant to understand that it is not any admirable piety on Samson's part that makes him a Nazirite. Rather, he is chosen and commissioned by God, even stirred by the Holy Spirit to participate in a special work—the salvation of Israel.

### APPLY THE WORD

Throughout the book of Judges, story after story should point our attention toward Jesus. Jesus is, of course, the better Barak, the better Gideon, the better Samson: the consecrated Son of God who saves His people from their sins and establishes not a temporary peace but a permanent one. What a Savior and Deliverer!

### PRAY WITH US

Dr. Junias Venugopal, provost and dean of Education, requests your prayer support for Moody's ministry of training men and women in the Word of God, to bring the gospel of Christ across the globe, cultures, and generations.

*In all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

Romans 8:28

## The Spirit of the Lord: Samson's Strength

Mary Mallon immigrated to the United States from Ireland in 1884 and began working as a cook. Several years later, Mallon was identified as the first healthy carrier of typhoid fever and the source of several severe outbreaks. But she did not believe health officials and resisted arrest. “Typhoid Mary” was eventually forcibly quarantined for the last twenty-three years of her life.

Quarantine, the act of separating the sick from the healthy, is a protective health measure to prevent the spread of disease. Similarly, a Nazirite vow was a kind of religious quarantine. But notice Samson's failure of separation. He did not heed God's command to separate from the inhabitants of the land. Instead, he wanted to marry a Philistine woman—against, of course, the wishes of his parents (vv. 1–3). Moreover, he did not separate himself from the contaminant of dead bodies but put his hand in its proverbial mouth.

The body of the lion he had killed with miraculous strength now hosted a swarm of honeybees, and Samson would let nothing prevent him from enjoying the delicious treat.

It would be easy to say that Samson is just one more example of the morally complicated people God uses to save Israel. But the book of Judges forces us to confront a difficult tension in verse 4: “This was from the LORD, who was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines.”

What are we to make of this? It is not biblically consistent to say that God forced Samson to disobey, or even that He tempted him to disobedience (see James 1:13, 14). But we can say that God uses human agents, even sinful ones, to accomplish His purposes. And here, God is using sinful, impetuous, sensual Samson to make good on His promise to save His people.

### APPLY THE WORD

Our human reason can't always understand God's intentions in our circumstances. But we can develop an attitude of willingness to trust God's good and redemptive purposes, even in difficult times. If He can use Samson as a deliverer to bless His people, He can use our challenges and trials in a way that will bless us.

### PRAY WITH US

We'd like to lift up to God in prayer the undergraduate faculty at Moody who provide both academic and spiritual training for our students. Today, we pray for Educational Ministries professors: Elizabeth Smith, Michael Milco, Mary Martin, and Nancy Kane.

TUESDAY  
JANUARY

17

*If by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.*

Romans 8:13

## Redemption by Revenge: Samson's Success

Hazma bin Laden, son of Osama bin Laden, has vowed revenge for his father's death in the 2011 at the hand of U.S. Special Operations Forces: "We will continue striking you and targeting you in your country and abroad."

Revenge is also the primary motive for Samson's brutal attacks on the Philistines. He repaid the men who solved his unsolvable riddle by striking down thirty men from Ashkelon (14:19). Then, he avenged the betrayal of the man he presumed to be his father-in-law.

The feast intended to celebrate Samson's marriage to a Philistine woman ended disastrously, but Samson assumed that he could return to his wife after letting his anger cool. But she had been given in marriage to another man, and Samson's anger flared as hot as the Philistine fields he torched (15:5). The Philistines responded by burning alive his wife and her father; Samson then

slaughtered a thousand men with the edge of a donkey's jawbone (15:5, 15).

Samson's victories were motivated by personal revenge, but God used them as acts of divine salvation. Even Samson himself acknowledged them as God's triumph (15:18). And by way of reminding readers of Samson's connection to God's history of delivering His people, Samson drinks water from a miraculous source, just as Moses and the Israelites had done on their journey through the wilderness (15:19). Israel will enjoy twenty years of peace—even if it is at the crude hands of the man, Samson.

We have foreshadowing that the peace will not endure. Is it not shocking how willingly his fellow Israelites would deliver Samson over to the Philistines? We might wonder if Israel even wants the rescue that God provides, or if they have become resigned to Philistine rule (15:11–12).

### APPLY THE WORD

We may think it strange that Israel might not want God's salvation—but we are not unlike them, especially in our slavery to sin. Do we accommodate sin as the Israelites accommodated oppression? Thank God for His salvation made possible through Jesus, and thank Him for the power of His Spirit to help you resist temptation.

### PRAY WITH US

As we continue to commit to prayer our Educational Ministries faculty—Dennis Fledderjohann, Peter Worrall, Robert MacRae, and Timothy Downey—ask God to bless their teaching and interactions with students in and outside the classroom.

*I raised you up . . . that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed.*

Romans 9:17

WEDNESDAY  
JANUARY

18

## Love's Confession: Samson's Weakness

George Foreman won his first heavyweight title in 1971 and was a dominant boxer for years. But after losing a fight in 1977, he had what he described as a near-death experience. Foreman decided to follow Jesus and became an ordained minister in Houston. Ten years later, he began boxing again, knocking out Michael Moorer to regain his heavyweight title. But as Foreman was quick to say, “Preaching is my calling. Boxing for me is only moonlighting in the same way Paul made tents.”

Samson also recognized his calling from God. His parents had told him the story of the visit of the angel of the Lord, and he grew up in the shadow of his prophetic words: “He will take the lead in delivering Israel from the hands of the Philistines” (13:5). Samson knew that he was a Nazirite and was supposed to abstain from wine (and other grape products), from cutting his hair, and from contact with a dead body.

But as we have already seen, despite knowing his consecrated identity, Samson had flippantly dismissed the constraints of Nazirite living. He has flagrantly flouted the rules—except, of course, that he had not cut his hair.

It's important to note that Samson didn't suddenly lose favor with God because he has virtually put a pair of scissors into the hand of his Philistine girlfriend, Delilah (v. 20). Even before his haircut, Samson was a compromised Nazirite. His shorn head is simply the most visible measure of his failure.

And this reminds us that God wasn't using Samson because of his exemplary piety. God was using him because He had chosen him and called him. That call, announced to Manoah's wife before she had even conceived, was evidence of God's grace. Samson had done nothing to deserve it.

### APPLY THE WORD

Some feel led to serve as missionaries or pastors. Others serve the Lord through work as bus drivers, accountants, or community volunteers. We're not all called to the same vocation, but all children of God are called “to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace . . . given us in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 1:9).

### PRAY WITH US

Please mention Paul Santhouse, vice president of Publications, in your prayers. As he heads the ministry of Moody Publishers, we pray that God will give him wisdom and strength to “be joyful always, pray continually” (1 Thess. 5:16).

THURSDAY  
JANUARY

19

*Their idols are . . . made by human hands. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see.*

Psalm 115:4–5

## God's Memory: Samson's Final Vengeance

The Americans with Disabilities Act was signed into law on July 29, 1990. The legislation ensured greater accessibility to schools, stores, stadiums, business, and government buildings. Additionally, individuals with developmental and physical disabilities should have access to community-based services and experience less discrimination. Even so, we can do more to see that all people in our society—able-bodied and disabled—flourish.

Samson's story is the longest in the book of Judges, and in the final episode we find a very different Samson from the previous chapters. The mighty warrior is now disabled. He is not invincible but he is vulnerable, having to be led by the hand of a servant boy on account of his blindness. He is not feared but mocked—the laughingstock of teeming crowd of Philistine spectators. He is not powerful but helpless, reduced to one last pleading prayer to the sovereign

God of Israel. As the curtains close on his life, the man called by God to deliver Israel is buried under a pile of rubble—victorious and vanquished at the same time (v. 30).

Samson exemplifies the nation of Israel during the time of the judges. Samson was a picture of spiritual compromise and eventual humiliation. His love for Philistine women lured him away from his call to separateness. Israel was also called to be holy and separate, yet they compromised their loyalty to God by serving the gods of Canaan (see Ex. 19:6). And though Samson prayed to God in this final scene, his prayer was self-serving. He wanted to avenge the loss of his eyes (v. 28).

Despite Samson's lust and vengeance and failure, God continues to glorify Himself. The temple of Dagon falls, proving that only one God hears prayer. Only one God saves.

### APPLY THE WORD

Samson's prayer was less concerned for Israel's welfare (and God's glory) than about avenging his eyes. And yet, God hears his prayer. May that encourage us! Though we pray "blindly," filling our prayers with self-serving requests, God hears. Let's confess our inability to pray, and remember God's graciousness to hear and answer imperfect prayers.

### PRAY WITH US

The ministry of Moody Radio involves many teams and stations across the country. For the next two days we'll pray for the contribution of the Program Production department and its staff: Amy Rios, Chris Segard, Joel Swan, and Lee Rugen.

*By [your commands] your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward.*

Psalms 19:11

FRIDAY  
JANUARY

20

## A Country Priest: Micah's Idolatry

Nearly one million Rwandans were killed between April and July of 1994. Hutu turned against Tutsi, exploiting their majority presence in the small East African country. This beautiful country, known as the Land of a Thousand Hills, ran with blood as Rwandan brother turned against brother.

Genocide is sadly not a modern development. In today's reading we're introduced to Micah, the man from Ephraim. The last time his tribe was mentioned, 42,000 were dead at the fords of the Jordan, killed at the hands of their Israelite brothers (12:6). Ephraim has not played an admirable role in the book of Judges, and their perpetual complaints about being excluded from military honors were finally answered by the sword. Worse, today's reading does not redeem their reputation but seems to confirm Ephraim's particular willful rebellion. Ignoring the commands that God gave to Israel to worship Him in the

tabernacle, the Ephraimite man, Micah, sets up his own private shrine in the hill country (v. 5).

The tribe of Ephraim might have been the national black sheep, but this doesn't acquit the rest of Israel. Micah's sin of religious syncretism isn't the only occurrence in Judges. Furthermore, we might also ask if neglect from the town of Bethlehem led to the Levite leaving his hometown and looking for another place to live (vv. 7–8). According to Mosaic Law, Levites were supposed to be financially sustained by the sacrifices and offerings of the people of Israel (see Leviticus 25). They were not allotted a land inheritance but rather had to be supported by their countrymen according to their priestly work. Had Judah failed in their responsibilities? Had the nation ceased bringing the grain and animal sacrifices meant for celebrating Yahweh—and also for feeding Levites?

### APPLY THE WORD

Micah seemed to think that he could manipulate God into blessing him (v. 13). He had a priest, he had a place of worship—surely good things would follow! We are often tempted to think that God will give us good things as long as we're good people and do a few religious activities. But that's not how our relationship with God works. He desires our hearts.

### PRAY WITH US

Joe Carlson, Ryan McConaughay, Steven Tabor, and William Davis from Moody Radio's Program Production welcome your prayers today. We appreciate their service of producing programs to increase the reach of Moody Radio for the glory of God.

SATURDAY  
JANUARY

21

*There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.*

Proverbs 14:12

## A Country Cult: Dan's Idolatry

In the countries of Canada, New Zealand, and Australia, pictures of Queen Elizabeth II hang in government buildings and appear on the national currency. Though these former colonies are now independent sovereign states, they retain an association with the United Kingdom and its monarchy, and Elizabeth II remains their queen and head of state.

Our reading today opens with a declaration about the status of Israel's government: "In those days Israel had no king" (v. 1). It echoes the same refrain from Judges 17:6, where the problem extends beyond a lack of leadership to include a lack of obedience: "Everyone did as they saw fit." (We'll see this same statement twice more later in the book of Judges, in 19:1 and 21:25.) Indeed, not only did Israel not have a physical king but they also rejected the leadership of God's kingly rule.

Today's passage is an ironic parallel to the earlier event when Joshua sent two men on a scouting mission into the Promised Land, especially Jericho (see Joshua 2). In both cases, spies are instructed to explore the area and bring back a report. Joshua's spies entered the home of Rahab, a prostitute, who told them that the Lord would give them victory; the Danite spies entered Micah's home, and his personal Levite priest assured them of the Lord's approval (v. 6). Both Joshua's spies and the Danite surveillance team are confident of victory and urge an attack on their respective targets of Jericho and Laish (v. 9).

The Danites have a military success but a spiritual failure. Rather than worship God in the tabernacle at Shiloh, they stole Micah's idols and took his priest and set up their own center of worship (v. 31).

### APPLY THE WORD

The Levite priest loved money, comfort, and power more than God, and he was willing to participate in idolatrous worship to get what he wanted. When we see religious leaders pursuing their own fame and fortune, we should be wary that they proclaim a self-serving message rather than the gospel of Jesus Christ (see Jude 12–16; 2 Peter 2:1).

### PRAY WITH US

Thank God in prayer for the talented and committed staff of Moody Distance Learning. They help Christians across the globe receive a Moody education while keeping their commitments to work, ministry, and family. May God bless their service!

*Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.*

Romans 12:9

SUNDAY  
JANUARY

22

## Outrage in Israel

A prominent atheist wrote about reading the story of Noah's Ark to his son: "It just never really hit me before how truly awful this story is."

Christians might be uncomfortable to hear this description of a story in the Scriptures. But today's reading includes a gruesome, violent story that reminds us that the Bible, while sacred, is not sanitized. In many ways, the Bible, not least the book of Judges, reads like the stomach-turning headlines of our local newspapers: rape, murder, war, prostitution, even human sacrifice.

Judges spares no horrible detail of the terrible events that end (finally!) in outrage. Notice that this is even worse than what happened in Sodom (see Genesis 19). Like Lot, the host offered the sexually rapacious men his daughter rather than his guest. But unlike Lot, the Levite shoved his concubine out the door, leaving her to

be violently assaulted. Further, the text has been clear that this takes place in Israel, in Gibeah in Benjamin (v. 14). The perpetrators of this horror are not Canaanites but Israelites!

When the Levite opened the door to leave in the morning (with no apparent concern for the whereabouts of his concubine), he nearly tripped over her on the threshold, as if she had been attempting to claw her way inside (vv. 25–26). And if these events aren't degrading enough, the Levite carved her up, limb by limb, and sent the bloody, amputated parts across Israel.

While the account is gruesome, we must never think that God is indifferent to these horrors. He allowed this nightmarish account of Israel's descent into sin to be recorded in His holy Word in order to remind us of how depraved we can become apart from His wisdom and leadership.

### APPLY THE WORD

God is outraged by evil. But notice how slowly Israel arrives at outrage in the book of Judges. It takes a brutally violent murder before they finally say, "Enough!" As God's people, let us demonstrate His outrage at the evils of our day. Let us be the people who say, "We must do something! So speak up!" (v. 30).

### PRAY WITH US

Dr. James Spencer, VP and dean of Moody Bible Institute, oversees the ministry of Moody undergraduate education on our Chicago and Spokane campuses. Please include him in your prayers today.

MONDAY  
JANUARY

23

*We are the temple of the living God. . . . Therefore come out from them and be separate.*

2 Corinthians 6:16–17

## War in Israel

After the genocide, the Rwandan justice system used community courts known as Gacaca to try hundreds of thousands of genocide suspects. These courts were convened in local villages with judges elected from the local communities. Some two million people went through the Gacaca court system, and 65 percent were convicted.

Judges 20 opens with all Israel from Dan to Beersheba (north to south) convened at Mizpah. They requested the testimony of the Levite, who self-servingly shaved some details from his story. He did not mention, for example, his marital troubles; he did not mention the threats of sodomy at Gibeah; he conveniently omitted his decision to do nothing to protect his concubine from rape and abuse; and finally, he accused the men of Gibeah of a “lewd and outrageous act” without acknowledging his own lack of outrage or involvement at the scene of the crime (vv. 4–6).

In fact, the text is ambiguous about whether the men of Gibeah actually killed the woman, or if she died from her injuries, or if the Levite himself killed her.

In response to the treachery of Gibeah, Israel assembled what looks like a national army. In any other circumstance, the collective response might have been a hopeful sign of regaining political unity, but sadly now Israel was mobilizing troops against their own brothers (vv. 10–11). Moreover, the eventual victory of the Israelites over the Benjamites can hardly be called a victory. Tens of thousands of Israelite soldiers were dead when the battle ended, and the tribe of Benjamin was nearly entirely wiped out.

In a sad, ironic coda of failure, the tribe of Benjamin is treated the way that Israel was supposed to treat the Canaanites: their villages are razed and their human population decimated.

### APPLY THE WORD

We rightly think that murder is terrible, but what about telling half-truths to get out of a jam? Idol-worship is clearly a sin—but what about seeking to cut corners to maximize our own profits? Judges reminds us that when we rationalize sins we think are small, we set our course for destruction. How much better to choose God’s path of righteousness!

### PRAY WITH US

Our Legal department, headed by VP and general counsel Janet Stiven, is an important part of the Moody family. We’d like to express gratitude to God in prayer for their integrity, professionalism, and strong Christian character.

*Choose life . . . and that you may love the LORD  
your God, listen to his voice.*

Deuteronomy 30:19–20

TUESDAY  
JANUARY

24

## Anarchy in Israel

We live in a cultural time of the reboot. Classic television shows such as *Star Trek* and *MacGyver* are remade. Popular music styles from the 1960s have come back into fashion, and clothing fashions from past decades parade down catwalks and sidewalks. Big-budget movies all seem to be sequels or prequels or an updated version of an old classic—just last year a new *Ben-Hur* film was released.

In this final chapter in the book of Judges, it appears at first glance that Israel has changed. But as we read on, we see that they did not renounce disloyalty and disobedience. The scene is like the remake of a famous movie. All of the elements of their former treachery are present.

Israel regrets the devastation delivered upon Benjamin, but they rely on human, rather than divine, wisdom for solving problems. They

demand an unnecessary oath to punish by curse of death those who would not heed the ruling of the court in Mizpah (v. 5). They put to death husbands, wives, and children of Jabesh Gilead and then claim the young virgin women for the surviving Benjamite men. When there aren't enough to go around, they plot to steal more women during a worship service at Shiloh. They justified this kidnapping and human trafficking by claiming fidelity to their vows (v. 18).

These events demonstrate that Israel is obedient—but only to their own self-pronounced commands, not to the Lord. The dismal end to the book reminds us that the choice to persist in sin will lead to manifold suffering. The final refrain, “Everyone did as they saw fit” (v. 25), should sound like a warning siren: Here is the devastation that happens when we forsake God and try to live on our own terms.

### APPLY THE WORD

Judges leaves us with the distinct impression that Israel is on the edge of national catastrophe. And while Judges leads us to 1 Samuel and the eventual inauguration of King David, even he is not the sure hope of Israel. Judges, like the rest of the Old Testament, point to our need of Jesus: the greater Savior, the true King.

### PRAY WITH US

Since the early days of Moody Bible Institute, media has been a powerful vehicle of Moody ministries. Greg Thornton, senior vice president of Media, requests prayers for the effective use of media's resources in our digital age.

WEDNESDAY  
JANUARY

25

*A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is  
God in his holy dwelling.*

Psalm 68:5

## Famine in Israel

Food insecurity and political instability often go hand in hand. The Arab Spring began not as demands for democracy but as riots in Algeria and Tunisia over dramatic price increases in staples like sugar, oil, and flour. When people can't be fed, political leaders will face mistrust at best and insurrection at worst.

Ruth's story unfolds in the time of the judges—which, as we've seen, was a period of political, spiritual, and moral turmoil (v. 1). The nation of Israel had lacked the political will to drive the Canaanites out of the land. As we learned earlier in our study of Judges, the Israelites initially enjoyed a degree of military success; while they did not drive the Canaanites from the land, they did subject them to forced labor. But that compromise proved lethal. The tables of power eventually turned, and the Israelites were the ones enslaved by the Moabites, the Amorites, and the Philistines.

As Naomi is introduced in these opening verses, we learn that famine drove her from her hometown and into the arms of oppressors. Whatever Naomi's dreams might have been for her two sons, they began to disintegrate the day each of them married a Moabite wife (v. 4). And if that betrayal of their Israelite identity weren't tragedy enough, death claimed her husband, Elimelek, and both her sons, Mahlon and Kilion.

Naomi and her daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, were vulnerable widows. Without husbands, these women had no financial security, no legal protection, no future—and it would seem, no hope. As Carolyn Custis James explains in *The Gospel of Ruth*, the Hebrew word for widow, *almanah*, comes from the root word, *alem*, which means “unable to speak.” But as we shall see demonstrated in tangible ways, if widows in ancient Israel were powerless, they were also loved by God.

### APPLY THE WORD

Because Ruth ends with a wedding and a baby announcement, it can be easily forgotten that such good news happened during such dark times. The book of Judges provides an important backdrop for the book of Ruth. It reminds us that even in our darkest valleys, we can have hope that God is working out His plan of salvation.

### PRAY WITH US

Patrick Friedline in Career Development helps students and alumni find part-time and full-time work on and off our campus in Chicago. Please include this ministry in your prayers today, asking for good communication and exciting career paths.

*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*

Romans 8:18

THURSDAY  
JANUARY

26

## Pledge of Allegiance: Ruth to Naomi

In his book, *Job: The Wisdom of the Cross*, Christopher Ash argues that the book of Job shows us how God treats His friends. It's a strange claim, considering that Job is a book about a righteous man who loses everything for no apparently defensible reason. But Ash notes that Job points forward to the Cross, which demonstrates that "there is undeserved suffering that makes possible undeserved blessing."

If Job is considered an important biblical example of human suffering, Naomi is next in line. In many ways she is the female counterpart to Job: a woman who loses everything for reasons we don't know and can't understand.

The example of Job also gives us some context for understanding Naomi's accusations against the Lord (vv. 20–21; see Job 30:20). Her words of complaint fit with the ancient Hebrew tradition

of lament, which the psalmists use as part of the faithful language for prayer (see Psalm 22). What's more, it's clear that Naomi hasn't given up on believing in the goodness of God. She blessed Ruth and Orpah, asking God to be kind to them, and she also recognized the Lord's goodness to Israel in ending the famine (vv. 8–9).

Naomi can't, however, deny the painful suffering she has endured. God is good to Israel, but God isn't good to her. She can't yet see that Ruth's unswerving loyalty is evidence of God's faithfulness. In a book that is often celebrated as a story of romantic love (we'll later meet the dashing suitor, Boaz), what is truly breathtaking, at least at the outset, is Ruth's love for Naomi. She makes a covenant with Naomi with terms even stricter than those of the marriage covenant: "May the LORD deal with me . . . if even death separates you from me" (v. 17).

### APPLY THE WORD

The end of Ruth 1 hints at God's blessing to come: "The barley harvest was beginning" (v. 22). The famine was over; the suffering had ended. This is God's promise to all of His children! Take heart from today's key verse. Famine is never the last word in the life of the Christian, not when God has promised a new creation (see Revelation 21).

### PRAY WITH US

Today, please keep in your prayers Dr. John Jelinek, vice president and dean of Moody Theological Seminary. We thank God for Dr. Jelinek's leadership and for all the lives touched and changed by MTS.

FRIDAY  
JANUARY

27

*What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds?*

James 2:14

## Pledge of Allegiance: Ruth to the Lord

In his book *Generous Justice*, Tim Keller seeks to understand what corollaries we can make with the gleaning laws of the Old Testament and the practices of modern-day business owners. For one, business owners should not “squeeze every penny of profit out of their businesses for themselves by charging the highest possible fees . . . and paying the lowest possible wages.”

According to the laws of the Old Testament, farmers and their hired servants were not permitted to meticulously harvest their fields. They were to leave overlooked sheaves of grain, olives, and grapes for the “foreigner, the fatherless, and the widow” (Deut. 24:19). In other words, by leaving behind some produce, the farmers were providing the landless poor with a means of financial sustenance that required the dignity of work. This is the generosity (and obedience to God) on which Ruth was

counting when she suggested gleaning in the fields of a local landowner (v. 2).

According to historical research, gleaners usually swept in behind two different sets of hired workers: first, the harvesters who cut the stalks of grain, and the bundlers who gathered the grain. But notice Ruth’s audacious request to glean behind the harvesters—and implicitly, ahead of the bundlers (v. 7). This would allow her to gather much more grain for herself and Naomi.

Ruth caught the eye of Boaz, the owner of the field. In their first conversation, he didn’t scold her for her boldness or tell her to be satisfied with a few crumbs. Indeed, he saw her request as more evidence of her audacious faith and her commitment to provide for her widowed mother-in-law. She had taken refuge under the wings of the God of Israel (v. 12)!

### APPLY THE WORD

Ruth pledged allegiance to the God of Israel, demonstrating the nature of true faith. By faith, she left behind life in Moab. By faith, she clung in love to her mother-in-law, Naomi, taking up the role of provider of the family. By faith, she put herself in the most advantageous position in the fields. Ruth shows us the active nature of faith.

### PRAY WITH US

Today and tomorrow, please set aside some time to uphold in prayer the staff of Facilities Maintenance on Moody’s Chicago campus. Thank God today for the faithful service of Carl Bjerga, John Addison, Matthew Morris, and Paul Heggeland.

*Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.*

Matthew 25:40

SATURDAY  
JANUARY

28

## Renewed Hope: The Kindness of Boaz

Several years ago, a Florida airboat tour captain was charged with feeding an alligator. But the circumstances of his “crime” were quite unusual. When he was hanging a fish he had caught over the side of this boat, a 9-foot alligator attacked and bit off his hand. The judge in the case no doubt enforced the letter of the law rather than the spirit!

In today’s reading, we see that Boaz is quite different than that Florida judge. He was a man, who followed the spirit of the law, not the letter.

Under Mosaic Law, Boaz was not bound to the unusual terms of the gleaning agreement that Ruth requested. But rather than enforcing strict propriety, which would have favored him rather than Ruth, Boaz went so far as to instruct his field workers to deliberately leave more grain behind for Ruth to glean. His generosity led to a heavy,

thirty-pound sack of grain for Ruth to carry home to Naomi (v. 17). When compared to the average one- to two-pound daily wage of a hired worker, Ruth’s harvest was unusually large.

Naomi used a particular word to describe Boaz’s striking kindness. In Hebrew, the word is *hesed*, which describes the bounty of God’s love. Translators sometimes translate it as mercy, love, loyalty, loving-kindness, and steadfast love. What’s clear is that Boaz is a source of God’s *hesed* in the lives of Ruth and Naomi. As one commentator explains, “God’s *hesed* is the centerpiece of the Ruth story, as it should be. The entire book zeros in on the weighty question of whether God’s *hesed* will run out for Naomi.” Our saving God uses Boaz to be the conduit of generous and faithful love that keeps two widows from starvation.

### APPLY THE WORD

We should take quite literally what it means to be the hands and feet of Jesus Christ in a broken world. When the hungry need food, when the grieving need consolation, and when the poor need defending, God loves them through us! Further, we love Him by showing love to them (see Matt. 25:31–46)!

### PRAY WITH US

Please add these Facilities Maintenance team members to your prayer list today: Peter Lawrence, Thomas Addison, and Vincent Camera. May God’s love and joy strengthen them every day at the workplace!

*Walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a . . . sacrifice to God.*

Ephesians 5:2

## Pledge of Allegiance: Ruth to Boaz

Proverbs 31 is often interpreted as the long to-do list of a godly woman: she must rise before dawn and go to bed late, keeping herself interminably busy with the affairs of her family, the needs of her community, and the concerns of her thriving entrepreneurial ventures. But Hebrew scholars have noted that the hymn to the “wife of noble character” was never meant to be read like a job description. Instead, it was a blessing that Hebrew men memorized and sang over their wives.

Ruth is like the woman of noble character described in Proverbs 31. Neither she nor Boaz are the heroes of this story—that role is reserved for God—but her relationship with Naomi does provide an example of what our obedience to God should look like. She is unswervingly loyal to her mother-in-law, for whom she leaves familiarity behind. She obeys her without hesitation, scandalously

taking her place on the threshing floor at the feet of Boaz—surely no place for a woman, much less an unmarried one. For Naomi’s sake, Ruth is willing to undertake risk. And isn’t that the nature of faith?

Once again, Ruth was bold. She asked Boaz, Elimelek’s cousin, to perform the duties of levirate marriage, which would require a brother (not a cousin) to marry the widow of his deceased male relative. She also asked him to fulfill the obligation of guardian-redeemer, which would make him responsible to buy any of Elimelek’s land holdings (v. 9).

Notice that by this time, Ruth’s “noble character” was well known throughout the town (v. 11). Though she had followed Naomi’s advice to ensure that she looked and smelled her best (v. 3), Boaz’s attraction to her was fundamentally rooted in the kind of person she had proven herself to be.

### APPLY THE WORD

Ruth’s commitment to loving Naomi appeared to cost her everything. Maybe we fail to love well because we are more concerned about protecting our resources of time, privacy, money, and energy. Whom is God calling you to love in this sacrificial way? How can you live out God’s *hesed* and spend yourself for that person?

### PRAY WITH US

Brian Regnerus heads the Public Relations department at Moody in Chicago. He and his team welcome your prayers as they represent and promote the mission of Moody Global Ministries through communications to various audiences and constituents.

*I am pleased with you and I know you by name.*

Exodus 33:17

MONDAY  
JANUARY

30

## Renewed Hope: Redeemed by Boaz

The furniture store IKEA recently completed a 12,000-person survey in twelve global cities. They asked people about their relationship to space and place, material things, and social networks. One surprising finding of the study is people's waning desire for social interaction at home. Twenty-five percent of respondents said they would prefer decent Wi-Fi in their homes to so-called social spaces.

In our modern world, social media allows us to be alone and still retain a semblance of human connection. But in the ancient world, the city gates were the buzzing social hub of the city. Social, commercial, and legal affairs were tended to, and when Boaz needed to resolve the legal matters regarding Ruth's future and Elimelek's land, he did so at the city gates (v. 1). With ten elders as his witnesses, he engaged in a shrewd negotiation strategy: he proposed the

most lucrative part of the deal first (the land holdings) before introducing the financial liability (Ruth).

The man who had the closer claim to being the guardian-redeemer rejected the terms proposed by Boaz (v. 6). Upon hearing that a Moabite widow—and her mother-in-law—was part of the obligation, the man decided not to take the offer. Most likely the man already had a wife and children, since he noted that marrying Ruth would endanger his estate.

Boaz then had full right to redeem Elimelek's land and marry Ruth, which he did with the hearty blessing of the community (v. 11). To be clear, Boaz's kindness extends from Ruth and Naomi to include Elimelek and Mahlon. His willingness to be the guardian-redeemer would ensure their land holdings and, should Ruth give birth, preserve their name (v. 10).

### APPLY THE WORD

**Boaz was willing to take on the obligations that came with loving Ruth, and through these obligations, God brought great blessings. God uses our relationships with others—even the ways that they obligate and constrain us—as a source for some of His richest blessings in our lives. Thank Him for your relationships today.**

### PRAY WITH US

Please pray for KMBI, Moody Radio's station broadcasting to the Northwest. Its staff, Chris Wright, Dee Marie, Scott LaVell, Debbie Carollo, and Joe Gonzalez, are committed to exalting the Lord Jesus Christ over the airwaves.

TUESDAY  
JANUARY

31

*Concerning this salvation, the prophets . . . searched intently and with the greatest care.*

1 Peter 1:10

## A Living Hope: The Genealogy of Jesus Christ

Even with scientific advances, many women endure the pain of infertility. Failed relationships, failed attempts to conceive, failed pregnancies, and even failed adoptions leave women childless. Infertility threatens to define a woman by failure and what she lacks.

In the ancient world, the lack of children—whether through infertility, the death of children, or lack of marriage—brought both emotional and social wounds. Without a son, a woman was vulnerable to poverty in the event that her husband’s family refused her kindness after his death. Scripture pays particular attention to the plight of barren women: Abraham’s wife, Sarah; Isaac’s wife, Rebekah; Jacob’s wife, Rachel; Manoah’s wife, the mother of Samson; and Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist. In each of these cases, failure is not the concluding word over their lives, for God reverses the curse and opens their wombs.

The text doesn’t tell us whether Ruth was barren; we know she had no children, though we’re not told why. But Scripture is absolutely clear that after her marriage to Boaz, “the LORD enabled her to conceive” (v. 13). For Ruth as well as for Naomi, the son Ruth bears is a blessing from God and a guarantee of a more certain future (vv. 14–15).

This son, Obed, is more than the consolation of Ruth and Naomi’s hopes—he inherits the hopes of Israel. Indeed, he is the ancestor of the great King David, who will unify the nation and establish peace. And both he and Ruth will be cited in the genealogy of David’s greatest descendant: Jesus (see Matt. 1:5–6). Jesus is humanity’s final guardian-redeemer. He is the true King of Israel and the only Savior upon whom we can rely. The books of Judges and Ruth point forward to our living hope in Christ.

### APPLY THE WORD

This month has reminded us to look for Jesus in the Old Testament. As our key verse says, a salvation narrative runs like a thread through the weave of the entire Bible. We can find Jesus in the pages of both Judges and Ruth. What have you learned about Jesus through this study? What have you learned about the ways that God works?

### PRAY WITH US

In conclusion of our prayer time this month, let’s thank God for everything we learned together from the books of Judges and Ruth. What a joy to know the salvation of our Lord and share this hope with others!

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