

SEPTEMBER 2012

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS

TODAY IN THE **Word**

A MINISTRY OF MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE

I have loved
you with an
everlasting
love; I have
drawn you with
loving-kindness.

Jeremiah 31:3



Jeremiah: A Message of Hope
in the Face of Judgment

TODAY WITH PAUL NYQUIST

President of Moody Bible Institute

Learning from Judah



Imagine that the Lord was to visit your town today in search of men and women who are honest and truthful. How many people would He find? Would you be one of them?

This is exactly what the people of Jerusalem experienced as recorded in the book of Jeremiah. God was willing to forgive the entire capital city if He could find just one honest person who was seeking the truth, but He found no one (Jer. 5:1).

The people of Jerusalem—and all of Judah—had turned away from the Lord. Their lives were wracked with sin, and they were worshiping false gods (Jer. 11:13). Among these gods was Baal, a god of the Canaanites (Jer. 2:8). Baal worship often involved animal sacrifice and prostitution. In addition to Baal, the people worshipped Molech, a god who required the sacrifice of children (Jer. 32:35).

In a tremendous expression of grace, the Lord sent the prophet Jeremiah to warn the people of the impending consequences of their sin and call them to repentance. Tragically, they would not listen. For 40 years, Jeremiah prophesied, but the people would not repent. As a result, the Babylonians invaded Judah three times, conquered Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, and captured the people of Judah.

Despite the heroic example of Jeremiah's obedience and God's promise of future restoration (Jer. 30:3), the book of Jeremiah is a

heartbreaking account of rebellion and the painful consequences of sin. Why didn't the people of Judah repent? How did they miss decades of warnings from God's prophet?

I've often told my children that it's easier to learn from the mistakes of others than to learn from the painful consequences of our own mistakes. As we study the book of Jeremiah, I want us to learn from two key mistakes made by the people of Judah that contributed to their downfall.

First, though they tried to appear godly on the outside, on the inside their hearts were corrupt. They continued to visit the Lord in the temple (Jer. 7:9–11), but in reality, their hearts were far from Him. They mistakenly thought their worship rituals would give them favor in the eyes of the Lord.

Second, the people of Judah ignored godly counsel. Because of their stubborn, hard hearts, they refused to listen to Jeremiah's warnings (Jer. 5:3). Jeremiah wrote about this foolishness when he described them as people "who have eyes but do not see, who have ears but do not hear" (Jer. 5:21).

Are we trying in vain to cover the sin in our hearts by following a religious routine? Do we humbly listen to the people God has put in our lives to speak truth to us? I challenge us to learn from Judah's mistakes by examining our hearts and repenting of the sin in our lives, so that we can be right with the Lord. May God find us to be honest people who are seeking His truth.

THEOLOGY MATTERS

by John Koessler



The Wrath of God

It is rare today to hear a sermon that focuses on the wrath of God. Some may even think that the very idea of anger is incompatible with the gospel's message of God's mercy and grace. Yet one theme in the book of Jeremiah deals with the real threat posed by the wrath of God. For example, in Jeremiah 4:4 the Lord warned His people: "Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, circumcise your hearts, you people of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, or my wrath will flare up and burn like fire because of the evil you have done—burn with no one to quench it."

The Hebrew noun that is translated "wrath" is derived from a verb that means, "to be hot." The imagery of heat often appears with statements that speak of God's wrath. The impression left by this language is terrifying. It is meant to be. Elsewhere the Scriptures warn: "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31). This is because God in His wrath is "a consuming fire" (Deut. 4:24; Heb. 12:29).

God's wrath is a reflection of His justice. It is directed toward those who do evil. Unlike our anger, which is affected by our sinful nature, divine anger is motivated by righteousness (James 1:20). In his book *Knowing God*, theologian J. I. Packer points out

that the wrath of God, unlike human anger, is never capricious, self-indulgent, or irritable. "It is, instead, a right and necessary reaction to objective moral evil. . . . God is only angry where anger is called for."

Believers and unbelievers alike have an intuitive sense of God's wrath, though not everyone will admit that this is their experience. This inner awareness of God's displeasure with sin is part of God's general revelation of Himself to all humanity. But it is also an aspect of the divine nature that sinful humanity suppresses (Rom. 1:18–19). One reason we are uncomfortable with the idea of divine wrath is because our fallen nature tends to live in denial of God's righteous nature and His wrath.

God's capacity to experience and express wrath cannot be separated from His other attributes of love and mercy or His propensity to show grace. To do so would compartmentalize His nature in an incoherent way. God does not have a split personality. His righteous anger is in harmony with His grace. Nowhere is this more evident than in the person and work of Jesus Christ, who bore our sins in His body on the cross and delivered us from the wrath to come (1 Peter 2:24; 1 Thess. 1:10).

For Further Study

To learn more about this subject read the chapter entitled, "The Wrath of God," in *Knowing God* by J. I. Packer (InterVarsity).

FROM THE EDITORS

by Elena Maffier

Today in the Word's Mailbag



Dear friends,

Your friendship, partnership, and prayer support are important to us. More than that, the ministry of *Today in the Word* would not exist without you, our readers. This month, we would like to thank you for your letters, notes, phone calls, and e-mails—a testimony to what God is doing in your life through *Today in the Word*. Here is a selection of letters and e-mails you have written to us lately. Thank you for keeping in touch!

I was born with a mental disability which led to sin, rebellion, and mental illness. I never knew what love was. But through counsel, medication, reading God's Word, *Our Daily Bread*, and *Today in the Word* for many years, I slowly came to realize the love of God and His care and compassion for me. Thank you so much for *Today in the Word*. Through its words and teaching, I have learned the love of Jesus, and I personally want to thank you from the depths of my soul. You have been a part of lifting me from deep darkness to the light. May the Lord Jesus Christ be praised!

—Arlene, IL

I have been reading *Today in the Word* since 2005, and I thank God for all of you every day. This devotional has inspired me to stay in God's Word every day and has helped me to understand the Bible better. I love the "Q&A" section. I never would have thought to ask the meaning of *hallelujah*. Being reminded of its true definition makes it so much more meaningful when I sing it or say it. The application section is so helpful and needed for my daily life. Thank you so

much for every section of this precious book. I would not change a thing. I thank God for the technology that allows me to read my *Today in the Word* [online]. May God continue to richly bless you.

—Marilyn (via e-mail)

Thank you for this monthly magazine. My daughter started me on it, and I'm glad to say that my niece is now also reading it. I'm 84 years old and I'm always learning.

—Dorothy, IL

I have been reading *Today in the Word* for over 20 years now. I've enjoyed being blessed each month by your excellent studies. Recently I moved to London where I couldn't get the monthly booklet in time. Even the daily e-mail didn't arrive early enough for my morning devotions. The discovery of your great website has fulfilled my needs. I go to the website for my daily study and also print out the monthly study in PDF for those times I may be unable to access the Internet. I thank God for how He has grown and blessed me through your ministry.

—Marcus (via e-mail)

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TODAY IN THE **Word**

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Jeremiah: A Message of Hope in the Face of Judgment

Jeremiah had a choice: go to Babylon to live in exile or stay in Jerusalem. He chose the latter—and the personal courage of this “weeping prophet” is a wonderful example to Christians in today’s world where the so-called Babylons beckon. Jeremiah remained faithful to the end in proclaiming truth to God’s people—despite imprisonment, abduction, and fierce opposition to his message.

This month in *Today in the Word*, we’ll take another look at the words of the prophet. We will examine the nature and the purpose of his call, we’ll study his warnings to the backslidden Judah, and we’ll marvel once again at “how wide and long and high and deep” is the love of God. We’ll find courage in the message of hope: God’s love and His presence with His people.

We hope that our study this month will strengthen your resolve to stay faithful to the end, to finish the race no matter what. There is comfort in knowing that we are not alone in this race. There is comfort for all of us at *Today in the Word* that we are part of the *Today in the Word* family—a community of believers studying the Bible together. Thank you for being part of that community. Thank you for your faithfulness. May the hope of Jeremiah’s words strengthen your faith and encourage you!

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The Prophet's Call

Psychologists tell us that we can determine a lot about someone on our first encounter—if we know how to read the signs. Body language, facial expressions, and first words can communicate an abundance of information to those looking for it.

The first words of the book of Jeremiah are revealing as well. We are introduced to the prophet Jeremiah, whose ministry runs from “the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah . . . down to the . . . eleventh year of Zedekiah” (vv. 2–3). Why are we given this background reference? A quick look at 2 Chronicles 34 through 36 reveals the history of Judah’s downward spiral from Josiah’s religious reforms to Judah’s exile at the hand of Babylon. And it is precisely during the history of Judah’s fall into wickedness that God proves His faithfulness by calling Jeremiah as prophet. God does not give up on His people, even in their

I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled.

Jeremiah 1:12

disobedience. He was prepared for this moment long before Jeremiah was born (v. 5).

Out of this call, we discover two important themes of the book. First, there is the prominent theme of judgment that is coming upon Judah. They have forsaken the Lord and turned to worship other gods. Like a boiling pot, destruction will come from the north. This is the message Jeremiah must deliver, and one of the recurring motifs of the book.

Second, however, we see the promise of God to Jeremiah. Despite the harsh message the prophet must deliver, God promises to give him the words to say and His presence as protection. Not only is God’s word against Judah trustworthy, but His promise to Jeremiah is sure as well. The Lord is “watching to see that my word is fulfilled” (v. 12). This is the character of our God.

Apply the Word

As you embark on your own encounter with the book of Jeremiah, pray that God would open your heart to see and receive what He wants to teach you. Despite the unpopular themes of destruction and judgment throughout the book, we can learn much about the character of our God in this study. Pray for the Spirit’s guidance as you go forth.

Pray with Us

Join us in lifting up Moody’s Board of Trustees. These 11 men give of their time, expertise, and talents to support the work God is doing through Moody’s education and media ministries. Ask the Father to give the trustees wisdom and unity as they serve Him together.

Israel's Betrayal

[Optional longer reading: Jeremiah 2:1–4:4]

Dale Carnegie, the author of *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, would likely have given a failing grade to Jeremiah. His first message was harsh, accusing Judah of idolatry and unfaithfulness toward God. Verses 14 through 22 summarize the state of things: Israel has broken their yoke, torn off their bonds, and rejected serving the Lord. They are described with a variety of word pictures: as prostitutes, an intractable vineyard, and dirty bathers unable to be cleansed. In the face of inevitable consequences, God reminds them “how evil and bitter it is” to forsake the LORD (v. 19).

Along with the summary of Israel's betrayal, today's reading also paints a portrait of the characteristics of sin. First, sin is a perversion. Like a youthful bride once devoted to her husband, Israel has perverted all that was good and

holy, and defiled it (vv. 2–3). Although there was no fault in God, Israel chose “worthless idols and became worthless themselves” (v. 5). Perhaps worst of all, the leaders of Israel (priests, rulers, and prophets), led the people into unfaithfulness (v. 8). Sin takes good and perverts it into something else.

They have
forsaken me,
the spring of
living water.

Jeremiah 2:13

Second, we see the ingratitude of sin. Despite God's generous gifts of a fertile land and abundant provisions, Israel repaid such kindness with the defilement of idolatry. Sin so often stems from such ingratitude toward God.

Finally, we are shown the sheer lunacy of sin. Astonishingly, Israel had taken its glorious God, who bestows living waters, and exchanged Him for worthless idols and “broken cisterns that cannot hold water” (v. 13). Who in their right mind would choose stale, contaminated water over fresh springs? Yet this is precisely the lunacy of sin.

Apply the Word

Today's reading calls us to take a hard look into our own lives. How might we, too, be guilty of forsaking God? How is the perversion, ingratitude, and lunacy of sin taking root and leading us to forsake the One who first loved us? Ask God for the courage to make an honest examination of your life and seek repentance where needed.

Pray with Us

Please pray for Dr. Junias Venugopal, Provost and Dean of Education, as well as his Executive Administrative Assistant, Denise Kuypers. Praise God for their service to more than 3,000 students who receive quality Christian ministry training.

Judgment from the North

[Optional longer reading: Jer. 4:5–6:30]

Except for Egypt on its southern border, any nation wishing to attack Israel would have come from the north. Even nations in the east would have moved north to avoid the trek across the eastern wilderness. It is no surprise that Jeremiah's word warns of the coming destruction from the north. What do Jeremiah's oracles tell us about this impending disaster?

Although there is a human agent, the real source of the coming destruction is God. The Lord's anger over Israel's idolatry had not been turned away. Like a scorching desert wind, God was sending His judgment against His rebellious people. The reason for such devastation is clear: Israel's own wicked conduct had brought this punishment upon them (v. 18).

The bulk of the chapter, however, details a vivid and horrific imagery of

God's punishment. The battle cry warns of "terrible destruction" (v. 6). Like a lion, the northern invader will wreak havoc and leave Israel's leaders appalled and terrified. In imagery suggestive of a reversal of the Genesis creation account, Jeremiah depicts a barren wasteland: "I

looked at the earth and it was formless and empty" (v. 23). Verse 19 epitomizes the coming torment as a voice cries out, "Oh, my anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain."

The scene in today's reading is truly dreadful, something akin to nuclear fallout where all life is decimated. And yet, even in the horrific face of impending judgment, don't miss the glimmers of hope offered. With the right response there may be mercy. God calls them to "wash the evil from your heart and be saved" (v. 14). Later, God declares His mercy again, saying, "I will not destroy it completely" (v. 27). Even here the mercy of God peeks through.

Jerusalem, wash
the evil from
your heart and
be saved.

Jeremiah 4:14

Apply the Word

Today's pictures of God's wrath and mercy both reflect His commitment to His people. His wrath demonstrates the seriousness of His relationship with us and how sin severs it. His mercy indicates His commitment to grace even in the face of foolish disobedience. Give thanks today that God considers His relationship with us something worth taking seriously.

Pray with Us

More than 40,000 Moody alumni are serving Christ in over 100 countries. Pray for Missions department faculty—Walter Cirafesi, Stephen Clark, and Clive Craigen—as they equip the next generation at Moody's undergraduate school in Chicago.

Jeremiah's Temple Sermon

Numerous polls and surveys indicate that for the majority of people, public speaking ranks as our greatest fear, even higher than death. If public speaking produces such anxiety, imagine being called to deliver a harsh spiritual message to a crowd of people at a religious center. That was precisely the task to which God called Jeremiah, to stand in the temple and deliver a message about Israel's sin.

One aspect of Jeremiah's temple sermon highlights the hypocrisy and self-delusion of Israel. Though engaged in all variety of sin, the people continued to return to the place of worship as if nothing was wrong. Indeed, they ran to the temple as a "den of robbers" (v. 11), deluding themselves into thinking that God would never destroy the very place of His presence. As hypocrites and self-deceived, they chanted their mantra, "the temple of the LORD, the temple of the

Are they not
rather harming
themselves, to
their own shame?

Jeremiah 7:19

LORD" (v. 4). Jeremiah's history lesson about Shiloh reminded Israel that the place of God's presence was no protection for those who remain in their sin.

Jeremiah likewise identified the sin of God's people in specific terms.

They had failed to bring justice to the alien and innocent and violated the explicit commandments of God. Most central to their failings, however, was their idolatry and lack of repentance. Notice that the sin of idolatry, in particular, does not just provoke God, but harms themselves as well. As God says, "They are harming themselves, to their own shame" (v. 19). Likewise, God had given His commands, "that it may go well with you" (v. 23). Serving and obeying the Lord is not at all like serving a cruel tyrant. Rather, God's commands are for our own good, and our obedience brings blessing and true satisfaction in our lives.

Apply the Word

Consider today Scripture's way of looking at sin. Our disobedience is a fundamental denial of God's blessing intended for us. Without a properly obedient relationship with Him, we miss the best that God has for us. Identify one thing in your life that is falling short of the best God intends for you; then do what Israel did not—repent and seek God's forgiveness.

Pray with Us

Continuing our prayers for faculty serving in the Missions department at Moody's Chicago campus, please bring before the Lord Elizabeth Lightbody, Michael Rydelnik, and Timothy Sisk. Thank God for their commitment to cross-cultural ministry.

Impenitence and Idolatry

[Optional longer reading: Jer. 8:4–10:25]

Our key verse today speaks of the folly of refusing correction. The first part of today's reading echoes this same idea as God described the stiff-necked behavior of Israel. They "refuse to return" (8:5) and "none of them repent of their wickedness" (8:6). In fact, they show no remorse or hesitation about sin at all. Even the birds have enough sense to know when to migrate, but the people of Judah lack all knowledge of God.

Whoever remains
stiff-necked after
many rebukes
will suddenly
be destroyed.

Proverbs 29:1

wisdom means knowing God's word and following it.

The second part of today's reading focuses on the sin of idolatry. The contrast between idols and God is clear. In a very real sense, there is an absurdity about idolatry. Idols are inanimate objects, carved from wood or stone, adorned by craftsmen, and carried about. Not only can they not speak or walk, they are utterly useless: "they can do no harm, nor can they do any good" (10:5).

The scribes of the law and the leaders of Israel claimed wisdom, but God revealed their folly. Where things were serious, Israel's leaders treated the matter lightly. Where there was coming judgment, their false prophets proclaimed peace. God's opinion was clear: "Since they have rejected the word of the LORD, what kind of wisdom do they have?" (8:9). True

The Lord, on the other hand, as the only true God, is uniquely superior. No one is like Him. He is "mighty in power" (10:6), the "living God, the eternal King" (10:10). And unlike the worthless idols, He is the creator and Lord of all things. The worship of idols, then, is not only sinful, but absurd. And yet, Israel persisted in their sin.

Apply the Word

We might laugh at Jeremiah's depiction of idols until we recognize that modern-day idolatry is alive and well. Our idols may include Hollywood's ideas about beauty, time wasted on the Internet, our job, or anything that turns us from God. What things in your life might be idols? Confess, and ask God to become the center of your attention again.

Pray with Us

Your prayers will be an encouragement to Elizabeth Brown, Vice President and General Counsel. Ask the Lord to grant Elizabeth discernment and insight as she provides legal counsel to Moody's ministries throughout the year.

Broken Covenant

[Optional longer reading: Jer. 11:1-12:17]

In the ancient Near East, powerful kings would often form treaties with their subjects by making covenants with them. Both king and vassal would swear an oath whereby the king promised his protection and blessing and the vassal promised his service and obedience. Breaking the covenant oath was a serious violation resulting in curses specified in the treaty.

The theme of God's covenantal relationship with Israel, and Israel's violation of their end of the covenant, lies at the heart of the book of Jeremiah. God had graciously rescued Israel from the oppression of Egyptian slavery and formed a binding covenant. The terms were simple: "Obey me . . . and you will be my people, and I will be your God" (v. 4). Unfortunately, God's people refused to uphold their end of the covenant: "they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed

Obey me . . . and
you will be my
people, and I will
be your God.

Jeremiah 11:4

the stubbornness of their evil hearts" (v. 8). The people worshiped other gods; the covenant had been broken.

As a result God reminded them of the curses specified in the original covenant. The people's sin was so egregious that God gave them over to their false gods. When disaster would come, Israel could turn to them for help—help that would never arrive. The Lord even instructed Jeremiah not to pray for the people, underscoring God's judgment on their covenantal violation.

One might think that in response to divine rebuke and warning, the people would turn to God in repentance. Instead, the men of Anathoth, Jeremiah's hometown, plotted to kill the prophet who delivered God's message. In the end, God's last word highlights the hardness of their hearts and seals their judgment for covenant unfaithfulness.

Apply the Word

When someone points out our failings and disobedience, we often become angry instead of heeding the admonition that can restore our relationship with God. Think of someone in your life who, perhaps like Jeremiah, helped you see your own sin. Thank God for His grace in sending that person to you. Then take time also to thank the person whom God used.

Pray with Us

Give thanks to God for the Legal department: Emmy Koh, Cassandra Blakely, Natalie Harper, and Hannah Roos. This team helps Moody's ministry partners in establishing wills and trusts and also provides legal assistance to Moody's ministries.

Prospect of Exile

We've all heard the adage that actions speak louder than words, or a picture is worth a thousand words. Sometimes words alone do not convince as well as actions. In the case of Jeremiah, God chose a similar course by having Jeremiah enact a kind of living parable.

God instructed Jeremiah to buy a new linen cloth, a kind of undergarment worn close to the skin, waist to knees. Over a long period of unspecified days, Jeremiah was to wear it without washing, then hide it in a rocky crevice, and then dig it up again. By the end, the linen cloth had become dirty, ruined, and useless. All of this was to symbolize God's intimate relationship with Judah that over time had become sullied and ruined. As a result, the Lord evoked another image, this time of wineskins and drunkenness, to depict the ruin and destruction coming upon His people. Sin

“Why has this happened to me?—it is because of your many sins.”

Jeremiah 13:22

has the effect of ruining our relationship with God.

Even so, Jeremiah offered yet again a call to do what was right—to pay attention to the word of the Lord, and to give Him the glory due His name. Time was running out, and if their pride and arrogance continued to prevent their repentance, captivity and exile were the coming judgment. Royalty would lose their thrones and crowns, supposed allies would betray them, and “all Judah will be carried into exile” (v. 19).

In the face of such coming disaster, a natural question might be: why is this happening? The answer is clear: it was because of Judah's stubbornness in sin. So accustomed were they to their sinful habits that they were as likely to repent and do good as an Ethiopian or a leopard would be able to change their skin. This is the dark danger of habitual sin.

Apply the Word

So much in the early chapters in Jeremiah revolves around God's call to repentance over sin. Is there someone in your life who needs a firm, but gentle, exhortation to turn from sin before an intractable habit sets in? Ask God today for the wisdom and courage to speak in love to this person that they might turn to God and live.

Pray with Us

We have the privilege of praying for Moody's undergraduate and seminary students studying at our campuses in Chicago, Illinois; Spokane, Washington; and Plymouth, Michigan. May God give them thirst for His Word, and passion for their studies.

Drought, Famine, Disaster

[Optional longer reading: Jer. 14:1–17:4]

Most teachers would agree with the old Latin saying, *Repetitio est mater studiorum*, which means, “Repetition is the mother of learning.” It usually takes repetition before a lesson will stick.

God did the same for His people through Jeremiah. Once again in today’s passages, we are met with the familiar theme of rebuke over sin and warning of judgment. Like their forefathers, Judah had forsaken God, followed other gods, and remained in stubborn disobedience. Even the prophet’s plea for God’s mercy fell on deaf ears (14:7–9). Jeremiah recognized Israel’s covenant faithlessness, but nevertheless turned to God, the “hope of Israel, its Savior in times of distress” (14:8). Yet in response, God reminded them of their unrestrained sin and their coming judgment. In chapter 16, God handed them over to what they wanted: to worship

Do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves.

Hebrews 12:5–6

false gods all day long, this time in a foreign land. It would seem that Judah’s sin had reached a climactic point of no return. God’s mercy was exhausted.

Or was it? Just when it seemed all hope was gone, we find within this dark message a new theme: grace. Briefly, but clearly, God hinted that after the imminent punishment, there would be a day of restoration to their land (16:14–15). Just as God once brought Israel out of Egypt, so again He would bring them out of the hands of the northern oppressors.

God’s grace is even bigger than that. Not just would Israel be restored, but all nations “from the ends of the earth” (16:19) would one day stream to the Lord, confess their idolatry, and be taught to know the living God. How marvelous that such dark warnings of coming judgment could also contain such glimmering promises of abundant grace!

Apply the Word

Praise God that we worship One who, even in His discipline, does not abandon His grace to us! The author of Hebrews also reminds us of this lesson: “Do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves” (12:5–6). Try committing these verses to memory or write them down, to be reminded of God’s grace.

Pray with Us

Let’s pray for Dr. John Jelinek, Vice President and Dean of Moody Theological Seminary, as well as Daniel Snoek, Executive Administrative Assistant. Please ask the Father to bless the retreat they are hosting for seminary students which begins today.

A Needed Picture of Blessing

Often in a hurricane, those who have endured the gusting winds and fierce rains will enjoy a respite from the storm when the eye of the hurricane arrives. More wind and rain may be coming, but for now there is a change of pace. The same is true in our reading today where we move from harsh rebuke and warning to a new tone: a description of blessing in relationship with God.

Perhaps in response to Jeremiah's earlier complaints about the difficult and unrewarding task of preaching God's word to a stubborn audience (see Jeremiah 15), God here offered Jeremiah new insight. Echoing Psalm 1, Scripture contrasts the one who trusts only in human strength to one who trusts in the Lord. Both are like plants. One is likened to a "bush in the wastelands" (v. 6) that knows no abundance. The other is like a tree planted by waters, verdant and growing even during drought. Both may experience difficul-

ty, but only the one who trusts in God will thrive.

Verses 9 and 10 continue the theme of God's blessing by using a proverb expressing the idea that the human heart is "deceitful" (literally sick or weak) and hard to understand. Nevertheless, God searches and knows the human heart and mind, and He rewards accordingly. Linked to the previous verses, Scripture assures us that God sees and knows the one who turns to Him in confidence, and there is blessing and reward in such trust.

The speaker of the text now shifts, offering Jeremiah's climactic confession that the Lord is the "hope of Israel" (v. 13) for those who trust in Him. Despite the opposition Jeremiah faced as God's preacher, he now confidently affirmed that true healing and salvation will only be found in God, "for you are the one I praise" (v. 14).

Blessed is the
one who trusts
in the LORD.

Jeremiah 17:7

Apply the Word

Like many who are called to preach God's Word, Jeremiah faced the challenge of opposition and needed the reminder of God's blessing. This Sunday, pray for all those who preach God's Word, especially those in your church, that they would be faithful to the truth of Scripture, and also find comfort and solace in the blessing of relationship with God.

Pray with Us

Will you include Landscaping Services—Andrew Hirschy and Ryan Yoder—in your prayers today? Join us in asking the Lord to give these men good health and safety as they work hard to maintain Moody's 23-acre campus in downtown Chicago.

A Pottery Parable

[Optional longer reading: Jer. 18:1–20:18]

To form a clay pot, the potter takes a lump of clay, places it on a rotating wheel, and uses a hand to shape the clay into the desired vessel. If the clay is not soft and pliable, and things don't go as planned, the potter smashes down the clay and starts over.

Today's reading draws upon this activity, as Jeremiah was sent to observe a potter at work. As Jeremiah watched, the clay "became marred" (v. 4), likely because of some defect in the clay. As a result, the potter then formed the clay into

a different kind of pot. Of course, the point was not to learn pottery, but to illustrate something about the way God works with His people.

The Lord is like the potter; we are like the clay. God may have one intention

for His people, but depending on how they respond (how yielding or intractable they are), God may rework the clay into something else. God illustrated this with two specific examples. If He had planned disaster for them, but they repented, then God would re-

lent. If, however, He had planned blessing for them, but they persisted in evil, then God "will reconsider the good I had intended" (v. 10). How we respond to God's work in our life affects our experience of God's blessing or curse. But either way, God is still the potter in control, and we are simply the clay.

Like clay in the
hand of the potter,
so are you in my
hand, Israel.

Jeremiah 18:6

Jeremiah was sent again to rebuke Israel for their remarkable infidelity to the Lord, and to remind them once more of the coming judgment (vv. 13–17). Yet don't miss the underlying mercy available: even as marred clay, if they would repent, the Potter would relent.

Apply the Word

Find a local craft store and buy some modeling clay. Leave half of the clay out for a day and keep the other half wrapped tight. Then try to form each lump into a small vessel, noticing what it's like to work with these two lumps of clay. Now ask yourself: which lump are you like, the stiff, dry clay or the soft pliable one?

Pray with Us

For more than 125 years, God has provided for Moody Bible Institute through the generous support of ministry partners around the world. Ken Heulitt, Chief Financial Officer, invites you to join him in praying for God's continued provision through His people.

Judgment on Evil Leaders

[Optional reading: Jer. 21:1–23:40]

Within the last six months, some companies have experienced problems with leadership. From the Yahoo! CEO's résumé scandal to J.P. Morgan's lack of foresight in investing, poor leadership has consequences. The same is true with the leadership of God's people.

Close to God's heart were the poor, the fatherless, and the oppressed. Indeed, Israel's leaders were responsible to care for such people. Whether the king himself or the unspecified "shepherds," God reminded them of their duty to "administer justice" (21:12), rescue the oppressed, "do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow," nor to "shed innocent blood" (22:3). Yet this is exactly where Israel's leaders failed. Rather than protecting the flock of God's people, Israel's leaders were "destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture" (23:1). In turn, God chastised

them for their failure and promised that they would be held accountable.

God would not "punish you as your deeds deserve" (21:14), however, allowing His wrath to break out upon Jerusalem, leaving it in ruins. He specified

I will raise up
... a King who
will reign wisely
and do what is
just and right.

Jeremiah 23:5

His tender care for His people by promising one day to gather a remnant together and to bring them back to the land. He would give them new, better shepherds who would care for them dutifully. Most importantly, there would be a leader

to come, "a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land" (23:5). When this "righteous Branch" of David arrived, God's people would be saved and live in safety.

God promised that in the face of failed leadership, He would send a perfect leader, Jesus Christ, the only true King and Shepherd of His people. Only then would they know full salvation.

Apply the Word

The hymn, "The King of Love My Shepherd Is," offers a powerful picture of Christ the Shepherd and King as declared in today's reading. Try searching for the words and tune to this hymn online or in a hymnal, and spend some time reading or singing the stanzas as an act of praise and thanksgiving in response to God's gracious gift in His Son.

Pray with Us

Our Investments team stewards the assets that our donors have entrusted to Moody. Please pray that Dawn Cox, Cherise Wilson, and James Chadwick will seek God's direction in everything they do.

The Meaning of Captivity

[Optional reading: Jer. 24:1-25:38]

The Babylonian exile of Judah occurred in waves. The first wave started in 597 B.C. with Jehoiachin and some leading officials of Judah going into captivity, while others remained behind until a later exile in 587 B.C.

Today's reading marks the beginning of the exile. But what does it mean? Perhaps the opposite of what was thought. Jeremiah was given a vision of two baskets of figs. One basket contains very high-quality figs and represents those first exiles who would find God's favor. God's promises to them are summarized in our key verse today, which concludes: "They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart." They might experience the pain of God's discipline, but God would not forget His covenant relationship, and He would give them a heart to return to God and to know Him.

I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD.

Jeremiah 24:7

The poor figs, so rotten they cannot be eaten, represent (somewhat ironically) those who were not taken into exile in that first wave. They might have been tempted to think they were safe because they were spared exile, but Jeremiah's vision explained otherwise. They were the bad figs. They would be "a reproach and a byword, a curse and an object of ridicule, wherever I banish them" (v. 9).

Here is an important lesson about God's discipline. On the one hand, just because we don't experience any immediate consequences because of our sin does not mean that God takes no notice or that we have gotten away with something. On the other hand, even when God does discipline us, His discipline does not mean abandonment.

Even in discipline, He has in mind our good and our restoration.

Apply the Word

You can create your own object lesson about the idea that God disciplines us for our good. Gather a small bowl of ripe, healthy-looking fruit and place it in a prominent place this week as a visual reminder that even when we sin, God can make us whole and well if we will only respond to His Spirit in us and return to Him.

Pray with Us

Continuing our prayers for the Investments team, will you remember Jeffery Knapp and Charles Moeri? Thank the Lord for their willingness to use their financial expertise to serve the Lord at Moody.

A Second Temple Sermon

Many erroneous views of God exist today. People may perceive God as simply a feeble grandfather. An equally misinformed view of God sees Him as a cruel tyrant. Jeremiah's message corrects these views.

Moving backward in time, we see Jeremiah again instructed to deliver a sermon at the temple (see Jeremiah 7). Here, we see similar themes to Jeremiah's earlier messages, but also a strong emphasis on the call to repentance and the conditionality of the coming disaster. Though God recognized Israel's history of repeated rejection of God's prophets, the true desire of God was not to punish but to relent and restore. God is not an ogre looking for ways to inflict pain on His people; instead, He desires a proper relationship with them.

The reaction by the religious leadership was, of course, not positive. They

seized Jeremiah, held an official trial, and were ready to put him to death. The brief story about the prophet Uriah underscores the seriousness of Jeremiah's situation. In response, Jeremiah offered a simple defense. God gave him this message, and if they obeyed, He would relent. If they killed the prophet, they would be signing their own death warrant. In other words, we may not like the message God has for us, but our dislike makes it no less true or urgent.

Perhaps they will listen and each will turn from their evil ways. Then I will relent.

Jeremiah 26:3

In the end, the earlier example of Hezekiah's positive response to the prophet Micah was used in support of Jeremiah, and they refrained from killing him. Although there is no indication that the leaders or people moved toward repentance, for now the prophet was allowed to remain alive. And for now, the opportunity to continue to hear God's word was the only hope Judah would have for salvation.

Apply the Word

The call of repentance and relationship with God is genuine, urgent, and for the whole world. Without it, there can be no salvation. Consider supporting church and parachurch efforts to spread the gospel around the world. Ask God in prayer how you can contribute to making Christ's salvation known in your community and beyond.

Pray with Us

Please uphold in prayer Eleanor Ehresman, Treasurer, as well as her team in Payroll: George Palmiter, Julie Vinlasaca, and Carol Walters. May they each experience God's grace and mercy at work today.

God's Sovereign Control

[Optional longer reading: Jer. 27:1-28:17]

Most leaders of a conquered nation would want to resist an invading power. This describes Zedekiah, king of Judah, and even false prophets were placating the people with promises of deliverance from invading Babylon. Jeremiah preached a very different message. Obeying the Lord's command to construct and publicly wear a yoke, Jeremiah proclaimed God's command to submit to the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Babylonians.

The message was given not just to Judah but to the surrounding nations as well. Those who resisted Babylonian rule would face disaster, but those who yielded to Nebuchadnezzar's reign would be blessed to remain in their lands. Why would God give such a message about a brutal enemy of God's people?

I made the earth
and its people
. . . and I give it to
anyone I please.

Jeremiah 27:5

The answer lies in understanding the sovereignty of God presented in today's passage. Nothing is beyond God's knowledge or control. God created all things, and He will "give it to anyone I please" (27:5). Even Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, was not a freelance ruler moving about on his own, but is described as "my servant" (27:6). At God's bidding Babylon would retain power for generations, but then it too would be subjugated to other powers. Everything that was happening to Judah, no matter how difficult, was still within the control of God.

Submitting to Babylon was also submitting to God who had orchestrated Babylon's rise, its conquering of Judah, and its eventual demise. The message through Jeremiah encouraged a deep trust in God's plan and control, even in the face of great difficulty.

Apply the Word

We may be tempted to think that the rulers of nations today are masters of their own fate, beyond God's hand. Today's passage reminds us that even presidents, kings, and dictators are under God's ultimate control. Let this truth be the catalyst for your prayers today: that God would use even global leaders to bring about His purposes in the world.

Pray with Us

Greg Thornton, Senior Vice President of Media, and his assistant, Karen Waddles, welcome your prayer support. Please join them in asking the Lord to help Moody reach more people—across the globe, cultures, and generations—with the truth of God's Word.

Question and Answer

Dr. Winfred Omar Neely, Professor of Pastoral Studies



I am very unhappy with our government. Is my sentiment uncommon?



No. You are not the first Christian to be unhappy with a government. I doubt if the church during the first three hundred years of its existence was happy with the Roman government, an autocratic, imperial, and totalitarian empire with political power concentrated in the hands of a few. Still, then and now, we are to respect our government officials and the offices that they hold even when we disagree with them (see Rom. 13:7; 1 Peter 2:17). According to 1 Timothy 2:1–3, God commands us to pray for our government and its officials during our prayer meetings. Nero was the emperor of the Roman Empire when Paul penned these words. Surely we can offer prayers on behalf of our government today!



As a Christian, do I need to submit to a government that I do not like? Does the Bible explain why we should submit to the government?



Paul gives us several reasons in Romans 13:1–7 why every Christian should submit to the government: (1) human government/civil authority, regardless of its forms and philosophical base,

is a divine institution (v. 1b); (2) God ultimately has appointed all existing governments, putting in place the people who hold offices in those governments, regardless of how they arrived in power—we can admit there is mystery here that we don't fully understand (v. 1c); (3) disobedience to the government is disobeying God Himself, as long as that government is not commanding us to do something contrary to God's Word (v. 2); (4) those who disobey will suffer the consequences (v. 2b); (5) governments are the Lord's means to maintain law and order in a society (vv. 3–4); and (6) conscience—we submit to our government not just to avoid painful consequences, but out of conscience before the Lord (v. 5).



May Christians take to the streets when they are unhappy with the government?



The principles of Romans 13:1–7 inform my response to your question. Unlike the Christians living in the first-century Roman empire, Christians in the United States live in a free and democratic society. Consequently we have a number of means to petition our government for a redress of grievances. Your expression, "Taking to the streets," is not clear.

If, however, you mean by "taking to the streets" public and nonviolent protests,

Continued on next page

We are to respect our government officials and the offices they hold even when we disagree with them.

Continued from previous page

it appears to me that Christians may be involved in such protests in our cultural context. Our Constitution guarantees the right to peaceably assemble, and so these protests do not automatically violate the law. Not all Christian thinkers will agree with me at this point. Nonetheless, peaceful nonviolent protests are one expression of responsible and informed citizenship in a free and democratic society.

The purpose of peaceful and respectful protest is to dramatize and draw attention to a sinful or evil practice that is embedded in laws and government decisions such as abortion on demand, unjust laws that oppress the poor and the needy, unjust wars, etc. Christians involved in protests should be Christ-like in their words and actions, acting in Christ's name because God's honor is at stake and people are being hurt, and not merely because they are unhappy with the government. Also please get the appropriate permits and be nice to the police who will be present to protect you and the other protesters.



Is there a place for civil disobedience in the life of the Christian?



Before I respond, I need to define civil disobedience. Civil disobedience is the refusal to obey a government's unjust laws and demands. Just because a practice is legal does not make it moral or ethical before God.

When a government passes laws that are against God and His Word, we are obligated before the Lord to disobey those particular laws—not as a political statement, but as a matter of conscience, submitting ourselves to God's higher Law (see Ex. 1:10–22; Dan. 3:1–30; Acts 5:27–29).

I also want all of my readers to realize that civil disobedience is a serious and sometimes costly decision (Rev. 6:9, 20:4). A good number of Christians across the globe are in jail or have become martyrs because being a Christian or even just talking to someone about Jesus in their context is a crime, a form of civil disobedience. Even in our own country, it was a dangerous and risky step for Rosa Parks not to give up her seat on that bus in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955. In Holland, during World War II Corrie ten Boom and her family were involved in civil disobedience, sheltering and protecting Jews instead of turning them over to the Nazi authorities. Corrie and her family paid dearly for their obedience to Jesus! Their "crime" was discovered, and they were sent to the infamous Nazi concentration camp Ravensbrück where Corrie's sister Betsie died.

Civil disobedience is not an expression of a Christian's displeasure with a government, but a courageous, often costly, step of faith and obedience to Christ! If you have not done so already, I encourage you to prayerfully read *The Hiding Place* by Corrie ten Boom.

Letter to the Captives

In 594 B.C., due to internal unrest within the nation of Babylon, vassal states would have been required to report to Nebuchadnezzar and reaffirm their loyalty. The same would have been true for Zedekiah, acting king of Judah, and along with that official correspondence, Jeremiah sent his own divine message to the exiles in Babylon.

The message from Jeremiah, of course, is really a message from “the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel” (v. 4) to those who had been taken captive in the first wave of exile. Scripture tells us that at that time a variety of false prophets were in Babylon predicting a very short exile. It was a message the people themselves wanted to hear. Yet it was not the message God had for them. Perhaps shocking to the exiles, Jeremiah’s letter instructed them to “Build houses and settle down . . .

Marry and have sons and daughters . . . Increase in number there . . . Also seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile” (vv. 5–7). Instead of cursing the Babylonians, they were to pray for their peace and prosperity. In other words, their exile would extend over several generations, so they should settle in.

I know the plans I
have for you . . .
to give you hope
and a future.

Jeremiah 29:11

Even so, the second part of Jeremiah’s letter offered profound encouragement. After a specified period of time, their fate would change. Upon their repentance and whole-hearted seeking of the Lord, God would fulfill His promise to return them to the land. Although their current situation may have felt bleak and hopeless, God would not forget His long-term plans for them: “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (v. 11).

Apply the Word

Today’s reading offers a powerful reminder that despite the difficulty of our life circumstances, we can still trust that God is in control and has not forgotten His abundant, gracious, and hope-filled plans for us. Perhaps you know someone in your life who needs to be reminded of these promises. Take that message to them today.

Pray with Us

Moody Radio owns and operates 36 radio stations across the United States. Thank God for Michael Bingham in Stations Administration and for Teri Vaughn in Marketing and Development, as they faithfully serve Moody Radio’s station managers.

Message of Hope (Part 1)

Scholars and commentators on the book of Jeremiah typically identify chapters 30 through 33 as “The Book of Consolation” because of its dominant themes of hope and comfort after prolonged messages of judgment. Chapter 30 contains explicit promises of restoration from the Lord, and Jeremiah was instructed to write these words down for posterity.

What would this time of restoration be like? All of the numerous themes involve both reversal and renewal. First, the yoke of their oppression would be broken. Judah would no longer be enslaved, and the oppressors themselves would be punished by God. Naturally, there would also be a return to the land first promised to Abraham. With that return, God promised to replace pain and fear with peace and security. The people would rebuild their land and restore their cities. What seemed like an incurable wound would in fact be healed by God

So you will be my
people, and I will
be your God.

Jeremiah 30:22

Himself. In turn, there would be “songs of thanksgiving and the sound of rejoicing” (v. 19). Their dark situation of exile, loss, defeat, and devastation would be reversed in dramatic ways.

God’s promises in chapter 30 also entailed renewal, particularly the people’s renewed relationship with God Himself. God’s very presence made it all possible: “I am with you and will save you” (v. 11). Likewise, Jeremiah’s message declared that instead of serving a foreign ruler, God’s people would “serve the LORD their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them” (v. 9). And their leader would have an intimate relationship with God so that in the end it would be said of them all: “So you will be my people, and I will be your God” (v. 22). At the heart of God’s renewal was God’s own presence and a restoration of true relationship with Him.

Apply the Word

God instructed Jeremiah to write His message down, probably so His people could return to it for assurance of God’s consolation. We can do the same to remind ourselves of God’s faithfulness. Choose a verse from today’s reading or some other passage of Scripture on this topic. Dwell on these verses and let God minister to you through His eternal Word.

Pray with Us

Moody Radio station WDLM broadcasts God’s truth throughout southeastern Iowa and northwestern Illinois. Will you ask the Lord to use Deborah Gustafson and John Johnson to bring revival to the Quad Cities?

Message of Hope (Part 2)

At the heart of God's relationship with Israel was the covenant, begun with Abraham and renewed through Moses and David. The story of the Old Testament reveals that Israel's history was plagued with covenant disobedience. That theme of God's covenant, and Israel's inability to keep it, dominates today's reading, one of the most important in all of Jeremiah.

Central to the covenant was God's character, particularly His grace, which is highlighted today. Because of God's "everlasting love" and "unfailing kindness" (v. 3), God would act to restore and renew His people and His covenant with them. That would include a restoration of joyous worship, prayer, repentance over sin, and an outpouring of God's grace. Consider who was included in God's restoration in verse 8! Notice also the tender, protective language God used with his people. Like a caring shepherd,

He would lead them by streams of water, "because I am Israel's father, and Ephraim is my firstborn son" (v. 9).

The crux of today's reading, however, and of the book of Jeremiah, comes in 31:31–34. This promise is found nowhere else in the Old Testament: a "new covenant." The need for a new covenant lay not in any defect in the old, but rather in the people's inability to keep it. But now, declared God, He would address that internal problem by writing His law on their hearts and minds. Through this covenant, there would be

a new, intimate relationship between God and people. Looking ahead we find that Jesus Himself evoked "new covenant" language during the Last Supper (Luke 22:20). The new covenant and its internally powerful dimensions, promised through Jeremiah, has now been fulfilled in Christ. Praise God that He does not forsake His covenant with us!

I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.

Jeremiah 31:31

Apply the Word

Jeremiah recorded the response of God's people as one of joyous singing and worship. Let that be your response today. Sing a favorite hymn or song of praise in grateful response to God for His covenant faithfulness. Or even write your own psalm of praise to our "new covenant" God as an expression of thanksgiving for His love for us in Christ.

Pray with Us

Custodial Services maintains classroom and office buildings on Moody's Chicago campus. May God give Gulmira Baibosunova, Chau Lavi, Tailor Nguyen, Do Tran, and Ernest Brown deep fulfillment in their behind-the-scenes work at Moody.

Actions of Hope

It is one thing for a child to say she trusts her father, but another to jump into his arms from the side of the pool! Likewise, Jeremiah previously had been declaring a message of hope, but now he was told to perform an action illustrating trust in God's word.

The chapter begins on the brink of Jerusalem's fall. The Babylonian armies had arrived, Jerusalem was surrounded, and the siege had begun. Defeat was imminent and inevitable, just as the Lord had predicted. And yet, God instructed Jeremiah to buy a field back in his hometown. Jeremiah fully obeyed, but everything about the circumstances would suggest that this was a preposterous idea—a complete waste of money. We see something of that sentiment in Jeremiah's prayer to God. He confessed everything he knew about God—His power, His character, His knowledge, His faithfulness—yet the end of the prayer indicates Jeremiah's own doubt.

I am the LORD,
the God of
all mankind. Is
anything too hard
for me?

Jeremiah 32:27

Why would the Lord ask him to buy a field in a nation soon to be overtaken and destroyed by the enemy?

God's response to Jeremiah gives the answer (vv. 36–44). It may have appeared that the end was near and all was lost, but God had additional plans—to return the people, restore their prosperity, and renew an "everlasting covenant" with them (v. 40). On the surface, things may have looked bleak, but as Jeremiah confessed earlier (and

God repeated later), nothing was too hard for the Lord (vv. 17, 27). Sometimes God's word may appear like an impossibility in the face of external circumstances, but for our God nothing is impossible—and we can trust His word, and live in accordance with His promises. Jeremiah's real estate actions, as absurd as they may have seemed at the time, demonstrate this important truth.

Apply the Word

In various ways, each of us is called to live out our faith in God's promises to us, even in the face of seemingly contradictory circumstances. Ask God for the courage to live out that faith in your life in real and tangible ways, whether by giving generously to others, sacrificing things you enjoy, or simply remaining steadfast in the face of illness.

Pray with Us

Continuing our prayers for Custodial Services, will you ask that the Holy Spirit provide spiritual encouragement to Francis Stuart, John Williams, David Applington, William Bielawski, and David Boskovic?

Message of Hope (Part 3)

Jeremiah's so-called "Book of Consolation" ends with today's reading. Previously, God had declared a reversal of Judah's plight, a renewal of relationship with God, and a new covenant with His people. Today, in chapter 33, God emphasized the comforting promise of restoration in two parts.

The first part of Jeremiah 33 focuses on the restoration of the people. Despite the grim scene of destruction in the face of Babylon's siege, God promised that it would one day change. Verses 6 through 13 present multiple images of a restored people. The devastated nation would be healed. There would be abundance, peace, and security. A once-desolate land would someday echo with sounds of joy and gladness, marriages, and godly worship. Central to these promises, however, was God's declaration that He would deal with the underlying problem in His people: "I will cleanse them from all the sin they have

I will cleanse
them from all
the sin they
have committed
against me.

Jeremiah 33:8

committed against me and will forgive all their sins of rebellion against me" (v. 8). Without cleansing from sin, there can be no true restoration. All of this, proclaimed the Lord, would bring Him "renown, joy, praise and honor before all nations on earth" (v. 9). God too receives glory and joy at His people's restoration.

The second part of today's reading focuses on the restoration of leadership. Given the failure of leadership among Judah's kings, prophets, and priests, these words were especially important to hear. God would not just restore the people to the land; He would raise up new and godly leadership as well. In particular, God promised a king from the line of David, a "righteous Branch" (v. 15) who would usher in salvation for God's people. This promise was then underscored with a comparison to the unbroken rhythm of day and night—that's how certain God's promises are to His people.

Apply the Word

The New Testament says Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of God's promises for godly leadership among His people. Through our King who leads us and our High Priest and Sacrifice who cleanses us from sin, we experience God's forgiving restoration. Confess your sins to God, and then thank Him for providing cleansing and restoration in Christ.

Pray with Us

Keeping our prayers focused on Custodial Services, let's lift up Andrew Franklin, Dean Gentry, Paul Henle, Danny Hutcherson, and Jessica Manning. Please request that God give them the energy and strength they need to carry out their responsibilities today.

Promises Broken, Promises Kept

[Optional longer reading: Jer. 34:1–35:19]

Every culture has had countercultural groups. Hasidic Jews retain a lifestyle distinct from other Jews; the Amish maintain an agricultural, nonmodern, way of living; and monks take vows of poverty and chastity for life. In a flashback to the beginning of the Babylonian invasion, Jeremiah 35 presents a similar group in Judah: the Rekabites.

We don't know much about the Rekabites. Their clan would not drink wine, build houses, or settle in the land. They led a nomadic lifestyle because their forefather had commanded them to do so. Many commentators understand these self-imposed vows as their own religious expression about God, connecting a settled, agricultural lifestyle with Canaanite Baal worship. At least from 2 Kings 10:15–17 we know that their ancestor Jonadab was staunchly opposed to Baal worship.

Will you not learn
a lesson and obey
my words?

Jeremiah 35:13

The importance of the Rekabite illustration had to do with their generational faithfulness to the vows. Even when Jeremiah invited them to the temple and offered them large bowls of wine, they refused to drink, citing their longstanding tradition and the command from Jonadab. Their spokesman explained that since that time, none of them had violated their way of life, and the only reason they were in Jerusalem was to escape the invading armies of Babylon.

God used this group as an indictment of Judah's lack of obedience. The argument moved from the lesser to the greater. If the Rekabites had obeyed a smaller, human command faithfully for generations, why had Judah not obeyed far more important commands from God Himself, even after the repeated reminders from the prophets? As a result, God promised punishment for Judah's generational faithlessness and blessing for the steadfast Rekabites.

Apply the Word

We can be more faithful to self-imposed rules than to God's commands. Are you more "religious" about watching that television show, getting your morning coffee, or keeping the lawn pristine, than you are about the more important practices of reading Scripture and prayer? Make a renewed commitment to relationship with God, not just religious habit.

Pray with Us

Concluding our prayers for Custodial Services, please remember John Pettett, Thomas Pizano, Oakley Smith, and Cathy Sywulka. Ask the Lord to bless this team for their commitment to caring for the facilities God has entrusted to Moody.

A Burning of a Book

In 2000, Li Guangqiang, a Hong Kong businessman, was arrested and sentenced to two years in prison for smuggling Bibles into China for underground Christians. Such attempts to stop the spread of God's Word are not unusual, yet Christian churches in places like China continue to grow by millions.

The importance and power of God's Word is seen in today's reading as well. Before the Babylonian invasion had even begun, God instructed Jeremiah to "Take a scroll and write on it all the words I have spoken to you" (v. 2). Jeremiah then dictated those words to his scribe Baruch, who recorded them in a scroll. Baruch took that scroll, went to the temple, and read aloud the words. The goal of all of this was clear: to give the people a chance to hear their sin, to be warned about their coming judgment, and to repent. It was both God's hope and Jeremiah's (vv. 3, 7).

The grass withers
and the flowers
fall, but the
word of our God
endures forever.

Isaiah 40:8

Two reactions are recorded in Jeremiah 36. At first, a group of officials heard Baruch's words and were struck with fear and alarm. They seemed to recognize the severity of the situation, so much so that they thought the king needed to hear about it as well. Even so, they realized that Jeremiah's message may not be very popular, and so instructed Baruch and Jeremiah to stay hidden.

Unfortunately, the king's reaction was not nearly as sympathetic. Upon hearing just part of Jeremiah's message, the king cut up the scroll and threw it into the fire. He then ordered the arrest of Baruch and Jeremiah. Yet, the end of chapter 36 is important. God once again commanded Jeremiah to copy His words onto a scroll a second time. Despite its rejection, God's word would remain; human opinion could not change it.

Apply the Word

God's Word remains true today. Consider supporting the distribution of Bibles in parts of the world where they may not be readily available. Ask your local pastor for a list of ministries, or visit Bibles Unbound (www.biblesunbound.com), a ministry dedicated to getting Bibles to Christians desperate for God's Word in their own language.

Pray with Us

Dr. Paul Nyquist, Moody's President, and his Executive Administrative Assistant, Judy Sandiford, would appreciate your prayer support. Would you join us in asking the Father to refresh their spirits with His Word and encourage their hearts through His people?

Continued Opposition

[Optional longer reading: Jer. 37:1-38:28]

In 589 B.C. the Babylonian invasion of Judah was interrupted when the Pharaoh of Egypt marched north against Nebuchadnezzar's armies, drawing the Babylonians away from Jerusalem. Against God's warnings, many in Judah looked to Egypt as their salvation. Many opposed Jeremiah's message instructing Judah to submit to the Babylonians.

Taking advantage of the Babylonian lull, Jeremiah set out for his home in Benjamin. Before making it out of Jerusalem, however, he met an accusation of treason: "You are deserting to the Babylonians!" (v. 13). Despite Jeremiah's protest, he was arrested, beaten, and imprisoned in a vaulted cell in a dungeon. He remained there for a long time until King Zedekiah called for him, perhaps hoping for a favorable word from God. Instead, Jeremiah reasserted his earlier message against Zedekiah and Judah. In

Remember your
leaders, who
spoke the word of
God to you.

Hebrews 13:7

other words, the Babylonian withdrawal was only temporary. This was not what the king wanted to hear, so he threw Jeremiah back into prison with a meager ration of bread.

If that was not enough, another group of pro-Egyptian officials were also not pleased with Jeremiah's message. To them, Jeremiah was demoralizing Judah's soldiers. Securing the king's permission, they seized Jeremiah and threw him into a cistern full of mud.

And that was where Jeremiah would have remained if it were not for a kind act of support and encouragement. Ebed-Melek, a royal official sympathetic to Jeremiah's word, and a true worshiper of God (see Jer. 39:15–18), saw the wrong that was done to Jeremiah and did something about it. With the help of thirty men, he rescued Jeremiah from the muddy pit. Not everyone in Judah was opposed to God's prophet!

Apply the Word

Faithful, godly leadership in the church is so important, yet not always appreciated. Use this week to be an encouragement to the spiritual leaders in your church. Write a note expressing your appreciation of their work, send a small gift of thanks, or make a personal visit to offer genuine words of encouragement. Even God's servants need such support.

Pray with Us

Moody Aviation, located in Spokane, Washington, is the nation's premier missionary pilot training program. Thank God for using Moody Aviation Administration—Cecil Bedford and Allison Pfening—to prepare students to serve as missionary pilots and mechanics.

The Fall of Jerusalem

[Optional longer reading: Jer. 39:1–40:6]

In the ancient near east, warring parties frequently used siege tactics. Armies would surround the city, cutting off all supplies of food and water while simultaneously working to breach the wall. Over time, the inhabitants were starved, weakened, and easily overcome. The Babylonians did this to Jerusalem over a period of eighteen months, when they finally breached the wall and took the city. The end had come.

Scripture also describes the fate of three individuals: Zedekiah, Jeremiah, and Ebed-Melek. Their fates, good and bad, reflect their obedience or disobedience to God's word. Zedekiah tried to flee into the wilderness. He was caught, however, and suffered a truly horrific fate. Taken to Nebuchadnezzar, Zedekiah witnessed the execution of his sons and then had his eyes put out. He was

shackled and then taken to Babylon. We never hear about Zedekiah again.

Jeremiah and Ebed-Melek received different treatment. Through Nebuchadnezzar's command, Jeremiah was released from his imprisonment and given his freedom to remain in the land. Unlike the fate of so many in Judah, no harm was done to Jeremiah. Likewise, our reading ends with a declaration of the safety and protection of Ebed-Melek (the supporter of Jeremiah in the previous chapter). God had a specific word for this man: he

And now the
LORD has brought
it about; he has
done just as he
said he would.

Jeremiah 40:3

would be rescued and spared the fate of the rest of Judah; he would escape with his life, specifically because he trusted in the Lord. And so this devastating fall of Jerusalem underscores both the blessing of obedience and trust in God, and the curse of refusing to listen to His word. There is no surprise here. God had done just what He promised.

Apply the Word

Sometimes Scripture reminds us of something we might know but have forgotten, like the importance of heeding God's word. Reflect on what things God might be trying to remind you about in your life, and then make a list of those lessons or spiritual goals. Consider sharing these with a close friend or mentor who can help keep you accountable.

Pray with Us

Steven Mogck, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, would be grateful for your prayers. Please request that the Lord grant him wisdom as he helps Moody's ministries harness emerging technologies, become more agile, and foster innovation.

Gedaliah's Assassination

Whenever we hear of a natural disaster that leaves inhabitants homeless, wounded, and in distress, we are concerned about the fate of people in the aftermath of the disaster. The same is true for the destruction of Judah, and our reading today gives us insight into the post-exilic situation for the Jews in the land.

The start seems promising. Gedaliah (who came from a pro-Jeremiah family) had been appointed as the new governor in Judah. Initially, Gedaliah rallied together those in the land and began the process of rebuilding.

Army officers and soldiers who had escaped the Babylonians came to Gedaliah and received assurances about the Babylonian officials. His advice echoed Jeremiah's earlier words—"Do not be afraid to serve the Babylonians," he said. 'Settle down in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it will go well with you'" (v. 9; see Jer. 27:11). Likewise,

other Jews who had been scattered during the Babylonian invasion also came to Gedaliah and began settling in the land. All appeared to be going well. The remnant in the land had a godly leader, familiar with Jeremiah's earlier message, ready to rebuild lives.

Settle down in the
land and serve the
king of Babylon,
and it will go well
with you.

Jeremiah 40:9

That status did not remain for long, however. Ishmael, son of Nethaniah, disrupted that peace in irreversible ways. Whatever his reasons (Scripture does not say), his plan was to kill Gedaliah. Not only did he do that (in a particularly deceptive way), he also

killed the other Jews in Mizpah, and the Babylonian soldiers. The slaughter continued when he (again, deceptively) killed a group of mourning men coming to Jerusalem to offer sacrifice over its destruction. Peace was now gone, and even though most would rally around Johanan to resist Ishmael, the damage, as we will see later, was already done.

Apply the Word

Many resist God's word and work in the world. But Gedaliah's response is instructive—rather than order his opponent's death, he sought peace and his well-being. Pray today for all those in the world who fight against God, that they would know true peace that comes in submitting to God's will.

Pray with Us

Today pray for the Integrated Marketing Communications department: Rachel Hutcheson, Elena Mafter, Linda Piepenbrink, Lawrence Bohlin, and Lynn Gabalec. Ask God to give them creativity and skill as they serve a wide range of Moody departments.

Flight to Egypt

[Optional longer reading: Jer. 41:16–43:13]

According to Mary Poppins, some promises are really “pie crust promises . . . easily made, easily broken.” That’s what we have in today’s reading. The remnant in Judah faced a dilemma. They had to choose whether to remain in the land and face potential Babylonian retribution, or to flee for safety to Egypt. To Johanan and others, Egypt looked like the best option, but on their way, they stopped to ask Jeremiah for God’s direction.

If you stay in this land, I will build you up and not tear you down.

Jeremiah 42:10

Notice the apparently godly tenor of their request. They asked Jeremiah to pray for them that “the LORD your God will tell us where we should go and what we should do” (42:3). They seemed truly to desire God’s direction, and even offered a vow demonstrating their commitment: “Whether it is favorable or unfavorable, we will obey the LORD our God, to whom we are sending

you, so that it will go well with us, for we will obey the LORD our God” (42:6). Everything about their request seemed good and right. They sought God’s help when needed, and promised to do whatever He told them to do.

In turn, Jeremiah prayed and then presented the people with God’s word: stay in the land and “I will build you up and not tear you down” (42:10); flee to Egypt and you will “die by the sword, famine and plague” (42:17). Given such a clear choice, and their earlier promises, the people’s response is surprising. They accused Jeremiah of lying, and declared him a false prophet! Johanan then gathered the people together and headed for Egypt, “in disobedience to the LORD” (43:7). Apparently their earlier promises were not genuine. Not getting the word they wanted, they broke their promise and went their own way.

Apply the Word

How often do we pray to God for guidance, saying we are open to whatever He wants, but when the time comes we just do whatever we wanted to do anyway? Maybe you have difficult decisions you need to make in your life. Will you take those to the Lord in prayer, genuinely seeking His wisdom, prepared to act in obedience when He reveals His will?

Pray with Us

Let’s continue our prayers for Integrated Marketing Communications: Joshua Jellel, Bryan Young, Brian Regnerus, Rhonda AuYeung, Julia Baad, Jennifer Enger, and Loral Robben. May they find joy in using their gifts to create print and Web content at Moody.

Disastrous Idolatry

[Optional longer reading: Jer. 44:1–45:5]

Pop singer Sheryl Crow epitomizes today's sentiments about right and wrong when she croons: "If it makes you happy, it can't be that bad." Apparently the ancient Judean remnant that fled to Egypt shared those ideas, and today's reading explains their coming fate.

Jeremiah delivered a word from God, explaining the consequences of their choice. All who fled to Egypt would die by sword and famine. None would return to the land of Judah except for a few fugitives. Just as God punished those in Judah, including the leadership, so now God would punish those living in Egypt, along with the Egyptian leadership.

God does not leave us guessing about why they would experience such a fate. The same idolatry that got them into trouble in Judah had been brought with

them into Egypt. They may have had new homes, new neighbors, and a new life, but they were the same people as before. They continued to burn incense to the "Queen of Heaven" and worship other gods. Not only did they persist in these practices, they did so willingly and stubbornly, even making vows to continue their idolatry. In their skewed reasoning, they argued that when they worshiped false gods in Judah, they were well off, and that the reason for the fall of Jerusalem was not their idolatry, but their failure to worship the Queen of Heaven.

Then the whole
remnant of Judah
. . . will know
whose word
will stand—mine
or theirs.

Jeremiah 44:28

One might expect that the events of the recent past would soften their hearts toward God's call to repentance, but nothing had changed. Their persistence in idolatry sealed their fate, leaving God to declare: "Then the whole remnant of Judah . . . will know whose word will stand—mine or theirs" (v. 28).

Apply the Word

How often do we look for a better life in a change of context, rather than a change in ourselves? Reflect on verses 7 through 10 as a reminder of God's genuine offer of relationship, if only we will remove our idols and turn to Him. Ask God today to show you those "idols," and ask for His empowering strength of the Holy Spirit to choose Him over them.

Pray with Us

Pray for Dr. Thomas Shaw, Vice President of Student Services. Ask God to grant Dr. Shaw wisdom as he leads departments such as Admissions, Academic Records, and the Alumni Association in serving undergraduate and seminary students.

Oracle Against Egypt

[Optional longer reading: Jer. 46:1-47:7]

Since technology allows us to record television shows, many people now simply skip the commercials or slow scenes and get on to the “good” parts. That’s how we might feel about Jeremiah 46 through 51 and God’s “Oracles against the Nations.” But we will miss important truths by fast forwarding past these chapters.

It’s important to recall that when God commissioned Jeremiah, He called him “as a prophet to the nations” (1:5), not just to Judah. We now see God’s message to the surrounding nations as well, the first being to Egypt. In a series of three different oracles, God declared Egyptian defeat, retreat, and destruction at the hands of the Babylonians. Despite their great preparations for war, their powerful kings, and their fierce mercenary armies, Egypt would be put to shame.

Though I
completely
destroy all the
nations . . . I will
not completely
destroy you.

Jeremiah 46:28

God was clear about why and how this would come about. The reason for Egypt’s fall was their pride. Verses 6 through 8 describe their arrogance like a swelling river, desiring to overflow into all the world. That pride would ultimately lead to defeat, but God was also clear about who would bring about Egypt’s destruction. It may appear that the Babylonians were in charge, but God declared that “that day belongs to the Lord, the LORD Almighty” (v. 10). Egypt would fall because “the LORD will push them down” (v. 15). God would bring about the fall of Egypt.

Finally, our reading ends with a shift to words of comfort for Judah. Even if the nations to which they had been exiled should suffer defeat and destruction, God promised that His people would not completely be destroyed. Their trust should be in God, not in any nation or its leaders, for protection.

Apply the Word

Today’s reading teaches us that no nation is beyond God’s control (or punishment) no matter how great or important they think they are, or have been in the past; and that salvation lies with God, not with earthly leaders. As the presidential elections come soon, pray for godly leaders, but let today’s Scripture remind us that our final hope is in God, not humans.

Pray with Us

The Alumni Association serves over 40,000 Moody graduates. Will you pray for Nancy Hastings and Tiffany Mariani as they organize the Alumni Board meeting taking place on Moody’s Chicago campus today?

Oracle Against Moab

[Optional longer reading: Jer. 48:1–49:39]

Moab was a longstanding enemy of Israel. A review of Israel's history reveals numerous conflicts with the Moabites who tried to subdue Israel or seduce them into worshiping false gods (see Numbers 21–25). In fact, Deuteronomy 23:3–6 forbade ten generations of Moabites from entering the sacred assembly.

This background helps us understand what lies behind God's oracle against them. Their fate would be similar to that of Egypt: destruction, devastation, and shame. Yet the numerous citations of Moabite cities, along with their god Chemosh, suggest a total and complete destruction. Likewise the mention of salt (v. 9) symbolized their utter devastation.

Like the oracle against Egypt, today's reading also underscores the reason for Moab's downfall. In particular,

[God] wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

1 Timothy 2:4

Moab was a proud nation trusting in their "deeds and riches" (v. 7). Later in the oracle, Moab's pride is referenced eight times in two verses (vv. 29–30). But pride was not the only problem. Moab was also rebuked for defying the Lord (vv. 26, 42), likely a reference to Moab's conflict with Israel, and for her false worship of other gods (v. 35). God was concerned about idolatry for other nations, not just Judah.

Despite this scathing, harsh oracle against a deserving Moab, notice also the glimmers of concern God demonstrated over Moab. In the face of devastation, God wails, cries out, and weeps for them (vv. 31–32). God told them that "my heart laments for Moab like the music of a pipe" (v. 36). And then there is the final word of restoration: "Yet I will restore the fortunes of Moab in days to come" (v. 47). What a glimpse at the wonderfully tender heart of God!

Apply the Word

Do we share God's heart for the restoration of all nations back to Him? Or do we only feel anger toward godless nations? Make a conscientious effort in your prayers this week to pray for nations that persecute Christians (like China, Sudan, and Saudi Arabia), that they too would be "saved and come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4).

Pray with Us

Please include in your prayers Jim Elliott, Vice President of Stewardship, and his Executive Administrative Assistant, Genesis Watkins. May God bless their efforts to raise funds for Moody's education and media ministries.

Oracle Against Babylon

[Optional longer reading: Jer. 50:1–51:64]

We've heard the expression, "Save the best for last." In the case of God's oracles against the nations, He has certainly saved the longest and most important oracle for last. Running 110 verses long over two chapters, Babylon's destruction and desolation was proclaimed with a thoroughness no other nations received.

Like the oracles against Egypt and Moab, arrogance and idolatry are reasons for Babylon's destruction. But there was more. Babylon would also face punishment for their treatment of God's people. Yes, they had been a tool in God's disciplinary hand, but that did not exonerate their cruel treatment of Judah. God described Babylon as a devouring enemy all too happy to crush Judah. They oppressed God's people and held them captive. In the end, God declared to the remnant: "Before your

eyes I will repay Babylon and all who live in Babylonia for all the wrong they have done in Zion" (51:24). The oracle against Babylon was not just a verdict of guilt, but a proclamation of God's protection and zeal for His people. He was their Redeemer, and He would "vigorously defend their cause" (50:34). Even in difficulty, God's protective watch does not relent.

They will
come and bind
themselves to
the LORD in an
everlasting
covenant.

Jeremiah 50:5

Embedded in this oracle against Babylon is an important message about God's covenant faithfulness. Another reason for Babylon's fall would be for the restoration of

God's people. In those days, the remnant would "go in tears to seek the LORD their God" and "bind themselves to the LORD in an everlasting covenant" (50:4–5). In turn, God would forgive them and cleanse them from all sin (50:20). The chastisement of God was real, but temporary; it was painful, but necessary for a restored relationship with God.

Apply the Word

Can you see this principle of restorative discipline in your own life? Create a brief scrapbook, journal, or collage detailing some of the ways God has used difficult circumstances in your past to bring you closer to Him. Consider including meaningful verses from this month's study as a reminder of the current lessons God may be teaching you now.

Pray with Us

Join us in lifting up Web Support: Lawrence Carlin and Kevin Davis. Ask God to give Lawrence and Kevin passion and excitement for the work they do at Moody. May He remind them of the valuable role their work plays in helping Moody fulfill its mission.

God's Word Stands Forever

For many American filmgoers, a happy ending is the best ending—all problems resolved, all relationships mended. The ending of the book of Jeremiah, however, doesn't classify as a warm and fuzzy finale. What lessons should we take away from this reiteration of the fall of Jerusalem under Babylon?

The ending of Jeremiah underscores the truthfulness of God's Word. From the beginning, God told Jeremiah to preach a message warning the people of Judah to expect disaster from the north because of their sin and disobedience. Just as God predicted, so it happened, and Jeremiah 52 recounts the details of that fulfillment. Babylon came, destroyed Jerusalem, and exiled thousands of inhabitants. Verse 3 offers a reminder of why: "It was because of the LORD's anger that all this happened to Jerusalem and Judah, and in the end he thrust them from his presence."

Your word, LORD,
is eternal; it
stands firm in
the heavens.

Psalm 119:89

The loss of God's presence is another important theme in chapter 52. Notice the amount of time spent describing the destruction of the temple, the divinely appointed place of God's presence (vv. 17–23). The explicit description of the details of the temple articles reminds us of the previous glory of the temple under Solomon. Now, the glory of God's presence has been replaced with desolation.

That's not the only message in today's reading. It may not be a Hollywood ending, but it hints at an aspect of God's word through Jeremiah—the promise of restoration. The last four verses in Jeremiah recall the favorable circumstances enjoyed by Jehoiachin. Though a wicked king, he experienced grace and blessing, a visible reminder to Judah that God's presence and blessing wouldn't be withheld forever. Restoration hadn't yet arrived, but that day would come because God's word is true.

Apply the Word

Jeremiah is a long and sometimes difficult book. Yet we know that all of Scripture can teach us important truths. Take time this Sunday afternoon to reflect on your study of Jeremiah, and then make a list of the top two or three lessons God has shown you in the past month. Thank God for His Word, and keep your list for future reference!

Pray with Us

Thank you for joining us for this month's study of the book of Jeremiah. As we reflect on this account of the people of Judah, let's search our hearts for attitudes that are rebellious, prideful, and unsubmitive. May we be humbly devoted to the One true God.

FROM THE EDITORS

Continued from page 4

I have been using *Today in the Word* for many years now. I keep a growing stack of my favorite issues and have used them in our family Bible study times with the children (now teens) or gave away to friends to introduce them to what I have discovered is an excellent biblical study resource. Keep teaching!

—Barbara (via e-mail)

I just have to tell you that I have learned so much this month [from the study of Leviticus]. I have to say I was not too excited about studying this book, but it has answered a lot of questions for me. Also wanted to say that after I pray for your requests every day I always add “and God Bless Moody Bible Institute.”

—Joyce (via e-mail)

Any time I read *Today in the Word*, I become refreshed in the Spirit; it carries a great anointing. It is my prayer that the Lord Himself will prepare souls for eternity. May our Lord Jesus Christ use His divine multiplication factor to exceedingly bless you always.

—Pastor Joshua, Nigeria

I thank our gracious God for the ministry of teaching that MBI offers. Each morning I glean something from *Today's* teaching and then our faithful God underscores what He has given me all through the day! Isn't it amazing how He loves us?!

—Deborah (via e-mail)

This past Saturday [March 24], Philip, one of the men in our church where I am the pastor, had just finished reading the devotional for the day, just as he always did before getting out of bed in the morning. That particular day, he put on his slippers preparing to rise—but then he fell back on his bed and slipped into the presence of Lord Jesus. When Philip's wife showed me the passage, we were both amazed. The reading for that day was from Luke 23:26–43. And the last words Philip read were: “Today you will be with me in Paradise.” And Philip was! I used this passage for his memorial service sermon.

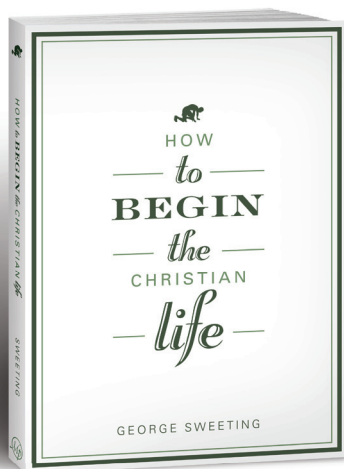
—Pastor Rod, IN

I start each morning reading *Today in the Word*. It's an encouraging way to begin my day. Thank you so much for the great messages and for spiritual things to ponder. I especially enjoyed the message on January 30 [that mentioned] Philip and Lucy Bliss. They are in my family tree. Lucy was the daughter of my great-great-great-grandfather, O. F. Young from Rome, PA. I've been blessed with knowing that I have such a rich heritage. I have Philip Bliss's memoirs, and D. L. Moody was a good friend of his. May Moody Bible Institute continue to influence the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ!

—Helen, FL



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