

Not Alone: God's Relentless Pursuit Judges & Ruth: God Hears His People

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From 35,000 feet, we are doing a fly-over of the Old Testament this summer. Throughout the Old Testament, God relentlessly pursued His people. Though they were fickle, God was faithful. Nothing has changed to this day. Though we are fickle, God—who never changes—is still faithful. He relentlessly pursues us. We are **never alone**.

We are doing a fly-over of the Old Testament, as if looking out of the window of a plane and seeing one sight after another. As we look at expansive passages of Scripture each week, we do so in FOUR distinct ways.

- L → Literal—What is the original meaning/message of the book?
- I → Incarnational—How is Jesus reflected in the book?
- F → Formational—How does the book apply to our lives?
- E → Eternal—How does the book point us to heaven and eternity?

We began this month in Exodus, where we learned that God *rescues* His people. Two weeks ago, in Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, we learned that God *provides* for His people. Last week, our fly-over of Joshua revealed that God *fights* for His people. This week, we fly over Judges and Ruth, where we discover that God *hears* His people.

Newsweek ran an article (“Astronaut Accidentally Calls 911 from Space,” 1-2-19) telling how Dutch astronaut André Kuipers accidentally contacted emergency services by dialing 911 while in orbit 200 miles above the earth on the international space station. The next day, the astronaut received an email asking, “Did you call 911?” His mistake set off a security alert with mission control in Houston. Kuipers later joked, “I was a little disappointed that they had not come up.” Even when dialing 9-1-1 from the international space station, 9-1-1 knows your location and who is dialing.

This is truer about God! “Call to me and I will answer you. I will show you great and unsearchable things you do not know” (Jeremiah 33:3). God *hears* His people.

LITERAL

As we flew over Joshua last week, we noted that Joshua is a book about victory. But this week, we discover that Judges tells a story of defeat. Those of us who are older remember a TV show called *The Wide World of Sports*. Each week's broadcast would show film of an athlete winning or losing while saying, “the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat.” That perfectly describes the end of Joshua and the beginning of Judges. One book ends with the thrill of victory—moving into and taking possession of the promised land—and the next book ends with the story of defeat as Israel is oppressed time and again by enemies.

The book of Judges is a *chronicle* that spans 350 years, whereas the book of Ruth is a *cameo* of one family within those 350 years. Judges is a wide-angle lens of an entire nation and Ruth is a zoom lens focused on a single family.

“After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel” (Judges 2:10). Soon after Joshua died and that entire generation had died, the next generation did not know the Lord or what He had done in the past for Israel:

rescuing them from Egyptian slavery, **providing** for them through the forty years of wandering in the desert, and **fighting** for them as they occupied the promised land.

They quickly turned from the ways of their ancestors, who had been obedient to the Lord's commands. Whenever the Lord raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived; for the Lord relented because of their groaning under those who oppressed and afflicted them. But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their ancestors, following other gods and serving and worshipping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways. (Judges 2:17-19)

This has been referred to in Judges as “the sin cycle.” Similar to cycles on a washing machine—wash, rinse, spin, repeat—the Israelites went through a five-step cycle:

- Step 1: Perverse** → They turned away from God, becoming wicked and corrupt.
- Step 2: Pain** → They then suffered under the oppression of enemies for years at a time.
- Step 3: Prayer** → When the pain was great, they cried out to God to save them.
- Step 4: Protector** → God sent them a judge (i.e., leader) to rescue them from the enemy.
- Step 5: Peace** → They experienced peace throughout the land while the judge lived.

This five-step sin cycle repeated seven times during these 350 years, and after all is said and done in this book of the Old Testament, it does not end with the people of God living happily ever after. Quite the opposite.

“In those days Israel had no king. Everyone did as they saw fit” (Judges 21:25). Wash, rinse, spin, repeat. Over and over again, the God's people were fickle while God remained forever faithful. Twelve judges are mentioned by name in the book of Judges, some with only a verse or two to describe them. During our flyover of these two books in the Old Testament, we will take a look at Gideon, of whom the most is said with 100 verses in our Bibles.

The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds. Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the country. They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys. They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count them or their camels; they invaded the land to ravage it. Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the Lord for help. (Judges 6:1-6)

And God heard them. He even had conversation with them.

God spoke of His perspective

The angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, “The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.” (Judges 6:11-12)

God heard their prayers of pain, fear and agony and He spoke to them. Notice that Gideon is threshing wheat in a winepress. Something is wrong with this picture. Threshing required wind, such as on high

ground. A farmer would use a winnowing fork and throw grain into the air, and the wind would catch it, blowing away the chaff while the heavy grain fell to the ground. A winepress was at the lowest point of a hill or valley because it was difficult to carry heavy grapes uphill to a winepress. Gideon feared the Midianites, so he hid in the winepress, throwing wheat into the air that must have fallen on and around him. It would have been a silly sight. But not to God. He sent an angel, a word meaning messenger, and the angel delivered God's very words to Gideon, calling him a mighty warrior. This was not mockery. This was visionary, even prophetic. God looked at Gideon and from His perspective, He saw a courageous, valiant, mighty warrior, not a fool and failure threshing wheat in the winepress. Their conversation continued.

God spoke of His purpose

“Pardon me, my lord,” Gideon replied, “but if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, ‘Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?’ But now the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian.” The Lord turned to him and said, “Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?” (Judges 6:13-14)

God heard Gideon's confusion about why all this suffering was happening to them. God heard his discouragement. Yet God spoke purpose into Gideon. God had a purpose for Gideon as a mighty warrior, a calling on Gideon's life, and that was to save the nation of Israel from the oppression of the Midianites.

God spoke of His presence and power

“Pardon me, my lord,” Gideon replied, “but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.” The Lord answered, “I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive” (Judges 6:15-16)

God heard Gideon's prayer of how weak and incapable he was for this purpose and calling. But God once again spoke to Gideon, promising both His presence and His power to make all the difference to defeat the Midianites. We read a bit further in chapter 6 that “the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon” (verse 34). God gave His Holy Spirit to Gideon, and it is worded in Hebrews to mean that Gideon was clothed in the Spirit. Gideon's power was not in the armor or weaponry that he wore, but in the presence and power of the Spirit that enveloped him!

And did God come through for Gideon? Yes, and then some! In Judges 7-8, more than 135,000 Midianite soldiers came to wipe out the Israelites (an army twice the current population of Franklin Township of 67,600). The 32,000 Israelite soldiers were outnumbered 4:1 by enemy ranks totaling 135,000. To make matters worse, God told Gideon there were too many Israelites and commanded him to let those who were afraid to go home—and 22,000 soldiers did just that, leaving only 10,000 men to fight 135,000 enemy soldiers! Then God told Gideon that 10,000 was still too many and the Lord reduced the army of Israel to a mere 300 men!

Do you remember an epic war movie called *300*? The fiction film, released in 2006, told of 300 Spartan soldiers who fought thousands of Persian soldiers. Move over Hollywood! God had the original *300* and there was nothing fictional about it! With God on his side, Gideon and his 300 men crushed the enemy, freeing the Israelites from their suffering.

You would think that life was good for years to come. Think again. Gideon asked the people to each give him a gold earring, from which he made an ephod. Think of it as a breastplate that a soldier would wear over his chest. This golden ephod became an object, an idol that the Israelites worshipped! Once again,

the Israelites were stuck in the ever-familiar sin cycle: wash, rinse, spin, repeat. Not once, not twice, but seven times this cycle was repeated throughout 350 years.

INCARNATIONAL

How is Jesus reflected in this book of the Old Testament? In the book of Judges, each protector or rescuer that was sent to save the people of God points us to Jesus. Each rescuer was empowered by God to bring peace to the land of Israel. Our rescuer, Jesus Christ, has come to make peace between sinful humanity and most holy God. Jesus alone is our Prince of Peace!

In the book of Ruth, we vividly see a powerful picture of Jesus. The word “kinsman-redeemer” appears eight times in the four short chapters of this brief book. This same word appears ninety times in Old Testament! For example, when someone was sold into slavery, their only hope for freedom would be for someone (typically a relative or kinsman) to pay a redemption price to the person who owned them. To redeem means to buy back.

The hero in the book of Ruth was a man by the name of Boaz, who legally bought back the property of Ruth and Naomi’s dead husbands. Boaz, the kinsman-redeemer, paid a price to redeem (buy back) the property, preserving their family line and name. Side note: when Boaz married Ruth, they had a son and from that lineage, Jesus was born! Who has preserved us, giving us a name that is His very name? Jesus, our kinsman-redeemer, who bought our freedom from sin with His death on a cross, paying our redemption price with His own life!

FORMATIONAL

How does Judges and Ruth apply to our lives, forming us more into the likeness of Jesus? Are we stuck in an endless cycle of wash, rinse, spin, repeat like the Israelites? Maybe our lives resemble the sheep in this video. Check this out. (View <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/iFqjRfiOqQs> to see the video.)

What caption could you and I put under that video? “That’s the story of my life.” “That’s Jesus and me on a daily basis.” “That’s why Jesus called us sheep.”

It is so easy for us to get stuck in a never-ending cycle of broken relationships, trouble at work or school, struggles with addictions, never-ending money problems, health challenges, unrelenting bitterness, explosive anger, increasing anxiety and depression. Here’s some good news. We are **not alone**. God *still hears* us.

Come and hear, all you who fear God; let me tell you what he has done for me. I cried out to him with my mouth; his praise was on my tongue. If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; but God has surely listened and has heard my prayer. Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me! (Psalm 66:16-20)

Listen to this simple truth: If I want my marriage to work, I must work at my marriage. That will require communication. If I want a friendship to work, I must work at that friendship. That will require communication. Similarly, if I want my relationship with God to work, I must work at that relationship. And that will require communication, which is known simply as prayer.

When Gideon was stuck, he cried out to God, and God heard him and answered him. Because God does not change (“I, the Lord, do not change” (Malachi 3:6)), we can count on him to hear and answer us. We need to do two distinct things to become unstuck: 1) believe it and 2) live it.

Believe It

The angel of God said to Gideon, “The Lord is with you, mighty warrior” (Judges 6:12). The angel, communicating on God’s behalf, called Gideon a mighty warrior. Even though Gideon did not see himself as a mighty warrior, God saw Gideon as a valiant, strong warrior. Satan did not, nor does he see us today as valiant men and women of God. The enemy does all that he can to make us see ourselves as shameful failures, as defeated, deficient losers. Per Satan, “There you go again, getting stuck in that sin. What a loser you are! And you call yourself a Christian! You’re a jerk, a hypocrite, a no-nothing.” Do not listen to his voice. Listen, instead, to the voice of God as He declares us to be mighty warriors, which makes us a threat to Satan and his minions. The Word proclaims that “we are more than conquerors through God who loved us” (Romans 8:37)! **Believe** what God thinks of you!

Live it

Did you notice how the angel of God spoke in two distinct ways. First, he spoke as FROM God (“the Lord is with you”), and second, he spoke AS God (“The Lord turned to him and said, ‘Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending you?’”). This is not an angel giving orders, but the Lord giving orders (i.e., a theophany). Moreover, this Hebrew phrase is in the perfect tense, meaning the action of sending has been completed but is still relevant in the present. The act of sending has happened in the past, but the action of sending is still relevant and needed in the present.

Think of it this way. In Genesis, God called Abraham to leave where he lived and to go to the land he would show him, and there he would make Abraham into a nation. God sent him on a mission. In Exodus, God called and sent Moses on a mission to bring the Israelites out from slavery in Egypt. In Joshua, God called Joshua to be strong and courageous as he led the Israelites into the Promised Land to claim it as their own. Each of those are examples of people being sent in the past, but it is now Gideon’s turn in the present. Gideon was being sent with purpose, and that purpose was to put up a fight.

When God wants to do something, He sends someone. He sent Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, David, Elijah, Elisha, and a host of others in the Old Testament era. Finally, when God wanted to save the world from sin, He sent His one and only Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus was sent to put up a fight! Jesus came to “destroy the work of the devil” (1 John 3:8)! After Jesus died on a cross, was buried in a tomb, and was raised from dead, He appeared to His disciples that very first night in the upper room, and He said to them, “As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you” (John 20:21).

We belong to a sending God, and God who does not change, is still sending us! Gideon asked the angel, “If the Lord is with me, where is he?” The Lord could have then said to Gideon, “I am with you, so where are you? Instead of complaining while being stuck in the wine press, how about you showing up and becoming the person, the mighty warrior, you can be? Are you going to put up a fight with the Midianites?”

What about us? Are we going to show up and put up a fight with Satan in the power of the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit clothed, enveloped Gideon (Judges 6:34) and the Holy Spirit inhabits us. The normative way we receive Him is when we surrender our lives to Jesus. “Repent and be *immersed*, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins will be forgiven and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38, emphasis added). God in our skin, the Holy Spirit, has all the power we need to break whatever cycle keeps us stuck. Just put up a fight, mighty warrior!

ETERNAL

How do these two books—Judges and Ruth—point us to heaven and eternity?

The book of Judges is an historical account of a long, dark era for the Israelites, during which God raised up leaders to deliver the people from oppression and save them from suffering. In much the same way, God has raised up the greatest Deliverer of all—Jesus Christ—who was raised from the dead and has delivered us from sin, death, and hell.

Judges ends with, “In those days, Israel had no king. Everyone did as they saw fit” (Judges 21:25). We DO have a King and His name is Jesus! He IS the high King of heaven and has already been crowned King of kings and Lord of lords!

There is a moment in the story of Ruth that points us to what awaits us in heaven. Again, the four chapters of Ruth are but a brief cameo of one family in this over-arching 350 years among all of God’s people. Here’s the Reader’s Digest condensed version of Ruth.

A husband-dad named Elimelech, along with his wife, Naomi, and two sons, Mahlon and Kilion, left their home in Bethlehem and moved to Moab because of a devastating famine. Bethlehem was in Israel, the Promised Land, whereas Moab was a foreign country with food. They lived there for more than a decade and during that time, Elimelech, Mahlon, and Kilion each died. Before the sons died, they each married women from Moab. Ruth, a young, widowed daughter-in-law, returned with Naomi to Bethlehem when the long-lasting famine was over at last! Here’s a description of their return to Israel, the promised land: “So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, ‘Can this be Naomi?’” (Ruth 1:19).

Imagine that moment. Naomi returned to Bethlehem, to *her* promised land, and as she walked down the street, the ladies exclaimed, “Can this be Naomi?” They recognized her and the entire city was stirred upon her arrival. Someday, when we pass from this life into the next and we enter *our promised land*, that of heaven, we will be recognized! How do we know that? When Peter, James, and John were with Jesus on the top of the Mount of Transfiguration, they recognized Moses and Elijah though they had never seen them before. Moses and Elijah had identity, just as Jesus did after He was raised from the dead.

Moreover, in heaven there is no measurement of time. Even Peter declared that “with the Lord a day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years are as a day” (2 Peter 3:8). So imagine the day when you and I enter our promised land, causing a stir, and our family and friends who are there, exclaim, “Can this be, Gary? What are you doing here already? Not even a single day has passed since we’ve been here!” What will that moment be like when we see Jesus face to face, in all His glory, as well as those that we miss and long to see again?

A few weeks ago on May 8, 2026, Frontier Flight #4345 was taking off from the Denver airport when a man who had climbed over an eight-foot perimeter security fence walked directly into the path of the on-coming jet. Regrettably, the man lost his life. When I heard a recording of the conversation between the pilot and the air traffic controller, they both used the term “souls.” The air traffic controller asked the pilot, “How many souls are on board?” to which the pilot responded, “There are 231 souls on board.” Souls. For years, federal air traffic controllers have been taught to refer to people on board a plane as “souls.” A soul is our real identity and existence. We are not bodies with souls. We are souls with a body. From the moment our parents conceived us, we were created with identity and value in the sight of God, who loves us and aches for us to be home with Him for eternity. The day will come when we draw our last breath here and take our first breath there—when we are home with the Lord and begin the rest of our existence that will never end.

Conclusion

When we do a fly-over of America while in a plane, something might stand out. The same happens when we do a fly-over of Scripture. What stood out to you from Judges and Ruth? How did the Lord speak to you through His Holy Spirit? Remember, God Himself said, “I, the Lord, do not change” (Malachi 3:6).

God *still* **hears** His people. We are **not alone**.