

# Faith & Leadership

Reflection: [Stories of Hope](#) »

## Jane Austen wrote the book of Ruth, and other truths I've learned in my first year of Tweeting the Bible

*Jana Riess set out a year ago to tweet the Bible, reading the Good Book and summarizing it in 140-character-long humorous commentaries. The project has proved to be fun, racy, messy -- and has connected her with a far-flung community.*

by [Jana Riess](#)



Composite Graphic by Jessamyn Rubio

October 12, 2010 | Update: Riess recently passed the halfway mark in tweeting the Bible.

Jane Austen wrote the book of Ruth; of course she did. But before I began tweeting the Bible every day, I simply missed the obvious signs.

Consider the opening scene: a down-on-her-luck woman, Naomi, has lost her husband and sons and shifts unsteadily, moorless in a culture that defines women solely by their relationships to men. Enter her plucky and faithful daughter-in-law Ruth, equal parts Elizabeth Bennet and Elinor Dashwood, who seeks to right the destitute family's future. Then make space on the stage for Colin Firth Boaz, the eligible bachelor who saves their entire family.

Yes, I am being facetious, but that is the posture of my [Twible](#) project, a cheeky use of Twitter that I began almost exactly a year ago. This time last October, on a trip to Southern California (the birthplace of more than one unusual religious idea or project), I consulted the Bible in the hotel nightstand for a single piece of information. Flipping through its pages I was then struck, Old Testament lightning-style, by all of the many parts of the Bible I never turn to, indeed have never read.

I could not at that time have told you what an ephod is, or why the books of Chronicles omit kingly tabloid headlines that are so salacious when the same stories are told in 2 Samuel. And the book of Habakkuk? No idea.

So I decided to try an experiment: I would work my way through the entire Bible, summarizing a chapter a day on

Twitter in 140 characters or less with humorous commentary. And I would do this in community. Like many Christians, I had tried before to read the Bible from cover to cover, without success. Now, I have others holding me accountable. If I'm ever tempted to give up, I think of Gwen and Steve and Kitty, who look forward to my morning Twibles as part of their day.

I still don't know the plot or characters of Habakkuk, which I expect to get to sometime in 2012 as I continue what looks to be a three-and-a-half-year project. I am aware that 3.5 years in human time is the equivalent of 1,000 years on Twitter, where we all have the attention span of a pot-smoking squirrel. But I've been delighted by the cult following the Twible has generated, as a growing cadre of more than a thousand people commit to seeing this through all the way to Revelation 22, unless the good Lord strikes us down first or Jesus should see fit to return.

That's not to say that the Twible is for everyone. It's too lighthearted for some, too irreverent. I've had a couple of complaints about R-rated content -- however, I think these arise because many people, like me, have never read the Good Book in its entirety and have no idea how violent, sexual, complex, beautiful and messy the actual Bible can be. I never stop being astonished by its depth.

Although this may appear to be a pious project, the Twible has not exactly helped my relationship with God. Having done the Torah and most of the historical books at this point, I'd posit that God has a good deal to answer for. It is difficult at times to find the mercy amidst God's direct commands to annihilate whole races of people. The humor of the Twible masks my serious and growing reservations about the character of God in the Old Testament:

#Twible Genesis 9: They've de-arked. G sends rainbow to promise he'll never again off us by flood. Keeps earthquakes, tsunamis in reserve.

#Twible Ex 12: G starts cooking show w only unleavened ingreds. Heb viewers follow tips; their 1stborns are saved. Egp'ns don't have cable.

#Twible Lev 10: Oh no! 2 of Aaron's sons lay altar fire incorrectly, so ever-merciful G burns them up. It's tough to be the preacher's kids.

#Twible 2 Sam 24: G's mad (where'd THAT come from?) & he's not gonna take it anymore. It's Yahweh or the highway, baby. Plague. 2 Sam ends.

God in these early books of the Bible is not a universalist but a nationalist, not a lover but a fighter, not a "second chances" kind of deity (unless your name happens to be David). Granted, it's not easy to capture the complexity of God in 140 characters or less, but I reached a nadir in Numbers 31, when Moses commands the destruction of every last Midianite.

Until I tweeted the Bible every day and attended to the big picture of its narrative, Midianites were just more of Those People Over There Who Need to Die Because They're in Our Way. Now, however, they had a history. They were Moses' in-laws, the people who took him in for 40 years (!) when he was a wanted fugitive after killing someone in Egypt. They were his wife's family. It's hard to imagine the conversation that went on in Moses and Zipporah's tent the night she heard about *that* particular day at the office.

Like I said, God has a lot to answer for.

But as anxious as I am about the character of God, I am heartened and strengthened by the flawed humanity of Twible people. How about the chutzpah, compassion and creativity of Abraham when he bargains with God for the city of

Sodom?

#Twible Genesis 18: A: What if 50 righteous are in Sodom? G: OK, I won't torch if I find 50. A: 45? 40? 30? 20? 10? G: OK, OK! Lay off!

The characters of the Twible are sinners at times, saints at other times. They've become real individuals for me who are, in the end, so very human:

#Twible #s 32: We're not yet in the Promised Land, but we're already arguing about who'll get what once there: "Dad, we want THAT pasture!"

#Twible 1 Kgs 2: Dying Dav advises Sol to follow Torah, but also to murder rivals now while he still can. So spiritual, yet so practical.

These people sound like me, minus the murdering of course. So while there's a good deal about the Bible that is alarming and often bizarre (according to Deuteronomy 13, if one of my friends has a dream in which a foreign god speaks to her, I'm supposed to kill her on the spot), other parts of the Bible speak to my heart. Or at least my funny bone.

Moreover, this process of discovery is occurring in community. One thing I have learned in my first year of the Twible is that it is not good for @janariess to read the Bible alone. Perhaps, as we see in Acts 8 with the Ethiopian eunuch, the Bible is always richer when we hash it out with others. Twitter has enabled me to study the Bible with people as far away as Taiwan, Bhutan and New Zealand, a community centered on ancient words but powered by up-to-the-minute technology.