

October 14

Scriptures: Read Ruth 1 & 2

Key Verse: "...wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God." (Ruth 1:16)

Overview

The land of Moab (east of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea) was inhabited by the descendants of Lot (Genesis 19:36). They were therefore distant relatives of the people of Israel but had forgotten their godly heritage and were idolatrous. It was there that Elimelech, Naomi, and their two sons traveled to escape the famine in Israel. The famine was probably a means of divine chastisement upon Israel, as was common during the rebellious period of the judges. God did this because of His love for them and desire to see them return to Him.

Bethlehem, the "house of bread (food)", was empty, so Elimelech left his God-given land of inheritance. This could not have been in God's will. In difficult circumstances, or because of self-will, some people choose the easy way out, but often this is contrary to the plan of God. There is always a "Moab" to tempt the people of God; a place which seems more pleasant. But, like the prodigal son, Elimelech and his family learned that Moab was not what it had appeared to be, and they paid dearly for venturing outside of God's will. It is much better to go through lean times in the will of God than to be full outside the will of God.

Naomi was left without a husband, children, or grandchildren, just two Moabite daughters-in-law. She recognized the tragedy that struck her family was the Lord's judgment (1:13, 20-21). Destitute and desperate she, like the prodigal son, looked toward her homeland. In Israel, unlike Moab, there were laws to protect and provide for widows and the poor. Only there could she find refuge, hope, and restoration.

Ruth and Orpha were both very close and devoted to Naomi, but Ruth's love was deeper. She was willing to abandon her land, family, and heathen gods. This was not because of her commitment to Naomi, but also because of her devotion to the One true God of Israel. She so beautifully expressed her devotion in the famous words of our key verse. Ruth's choice led to wonderful blessings.

Naomi returned to Bethlehem emptied of all she had; thus, as was common in those days, she gave herself a descriptive name: Mam meaning "bitter" rather than Naomi which meant "pleasant". She was not bitter against God, rather the personal circumstances of her life over the past ten years had been bitter. Yet God was sovereignly in control and would care for her, as well as Ruth. In God's plan, Ruth took upon herself the responsibility to provide for her mother-in-law. In accordance with the law of Moses that provided for the needy (Leviticus 19:9-10; 23:22, Deuteronomy 24:19), Ruth gleaned what remained after the harvesters. Providence led her to the field of Boaz where she experienced undeserved grace and favour from this wealthy and generous kinsman of Naomi. Centuries later, in this same area of fields around Bethlehem, God showed all mankind undeserved grace in the angelic announcement of our Lord's birth.

Naomi thanked God and was encouraged with a new-found hope when she heard of the kindness Boaz had shown Ruth (2:20). Since Boaz was a near kinsman of her late husband, Elimelech, he could potentially serve as a kinsman-redeemer to not only restore the family's lost inheritance of land, but provide an heir to perpetuate their family line (cf. Deuteronomy 25:5-6). Naomi was finally content when she recognized that God, in His great kindness, had not forsaken her (3:20). In difficult circumstances we, too, must not lose hope but rather trust in the fact that our Lord will never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).

Prayer

Dear Lord, once we were strangers and foreigners like Ruth. Thank you that You accepted us into Your family. Grant that we will cling to You as Ruth did to Naomi with a determined loyalty. Amen!