



... and the name of the other Ruth ...

Part One

¹ Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehemjudah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons. ² And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehemjudah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there. ³ And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons. ⁴ And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years. ⁵ And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband. (Ruth 1:1-5)

God is quite circumspect in His Word, yet, He does not add drama but allows drama to be its own witness. “Now it came to pass in those days...” is not a very exciting introduction of a Book that bears the very promise and picture of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; but God allows Water of His Word (in meaning) to fall on all grounds. Please recall the introduction of one of the most glorious and exciting chapters of all of the Bible – the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 2 – “And it came to pass in those days,” (Luke 2:1a) Truly, with God, such a commonplace introduction simply is truth well-spoken for it introduces the first of two Books of the Bible named after a very important woman – Ruth! Why is Ruth such a woman of prominence? Because the story of Ruth is akin to the story of the Church and her Bridegroom, Jesus Christ. The Book of Ruth is a Garden of Grace in a Wilderness of Law and Judgment.

It is puzzling to us that God's people simply cannot seem to ‘stay put’ where God has told them to stay. Abraham could not seem to remain at Bethel but kept going down into Egypt and other places where God had not told him to go. In every case, he experienced troubles and shortcomings. The same is true of Isaac and Jacob. Now we see that Elimelech opts for the temporal pleasures of Moab over the blessings of a famine-stricken Bethlehem. His experience will teach us that it is far better to suffer the famine-chastening of the Lord in the right place and among God's own people than to enjoy opulence among the heathen and cursed races of people.

Elimelech took his wife, Naomi, and two sons – Mahlon and Chilion – out of Bethlehem-Judah (House of Bread and Praise) into a land that God had cursed for its disdain for the Children of Israel while they struggled in the Wilderness. It was a place of dying, and the place where Moses is buried beside the slopes and streams of Mount Nebo in an unmarked grave. Moab and Ammon were the two lands founded by the sons of Lot after an incestuous relationship with his two daughters outside the ruins of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Elimelech was not a poor man. He was a man of means who owned lands and property; yet, he left these to go to a place that offered, in his mind, a better opportunity to increase his wealth rather than suffer the mundane cessation of crops in his hometown of Bethlehem which was stricken by famine sent by God. We all have acted as foolishly as Elimelech, haven't we? Always believing the grass to be greener on the other hillside, we cross bog and marsh to get to that 'greener' grass and find that it is loco-weed or sagebrush.

The Prodigal Son of his father did the same. He would take his inheritance and live 'high on the hog' in a far country; but instead of living high on the hog, he wound up living amongst the hogs and desiring to eat their slop. This is the poison of materialism over spiritual character. Opting for the glitter of Las Vegas, we take our treasures there and, if we return at all, we come back empty-handed and in want of bread.

What happens when a man, or woman, journeys out of the will of God where He has called them? What happened to Abraham in Egypt? What happened to the Prodigal Son in a far country? What happened to Elimelech in Moab? Let us see about that in the account given in the Book of Ruth.

The Book of Ruth is the eighth book of the Bible. Biblically speaking, the number eight symbolizes "New Beginnings." It is a Lone Mountain of Grace emerging from the swamps and wildernesses of the law and judgment of the Old Testament period from Eden to Judges. It follows immediately on the last verse of Judges which reads: *In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.* (Judges 21:25) Actually, there truly was a King in Israel – the Lord God Almighty, but the people rejected Him and desired a king like all of the other nations round about. *"Men did that which was right in their own eyes."* Lawlessness is godlessness! Godlessness always begets famine. And so the Book of Ruth opens with a famine in the land. Many will happily endure the years of plenty in God's blessing, but they want to forego the famine that God sends for their lack of fidelity to Him and their lawlessness. But, as Jonah learned, the man of God cannot go far enough to be beyond the reach of God. When we go from the place God has appointed, trouble ensues.

The man, Elimelech, not only took himself, but his wife and sons into the accursed land of Moab – not out of necessity, but perhaps out of greed or contempt for the place God placed him. *"Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehemjudah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons."* It is dangerous enough for a man to carry himself out of the will of God, but to carry his family into such danger-ridden terrain is sheer foolishness. What happened to Elimelech in Moab? *"And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there."* Elimelech was tempted by the better conditions that seemed to exist in Moab. He went to sojourn there (temporary visit) but what happened. He forgot his sojourn and made it a permanent stay – he '*continued there.*' We often feel that we can touch the hot stove briefly enough not to be burned, but our scorched fingers testify against our assumptions. Lot *"pitched his tent TOWARD Sodom"* and wound up a judge in the gate of the city. A righteous man does

not even take a step toward the wretched tree of Eden. *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.* (Psalms 1:1) The righteous man does not go with the crowd of the ungodly; he does not stand with them in their discourses; and he does not sit down with them and make himself at home in their misery.

And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons. Poor Naomi would now mourn the loss of her husband in this dark land of Moab. But she yet had her two sons. She would be well-advised to leave this accursed land while she still had them. But God will work His will even when we are in an accursed land. The two sons no doubt had grown to like the new land of Moab. They were at home in this strange land. They may have not listened to their mother even if she insisted on leaving. She was left with her two sons in this unblest land. So all three remained there. *And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth.*

The whole sordid affair would have been a disgraceful failure except for the last name mentioned in this verse – RUTH! To know Ruth is to love Ruth! Now that her sons were married to Moabite women, it would take a team of wild horses to drag them out of Moab – or death! “. . . **and they dwelled there about ten years. And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them.**” The sad truth is that there is never any gain in going out from the will of the Lord. After her husband died, Naomi was left with her two sons. Now that the two sons have died, she is left with only her two daughters-in-law. But one of them is a golden treasure. “. . . *and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband.*” Naomi had come to Moab with an Israelite husband, and two Israelite sons; now all she has remaining are two Moabitish daughters-in-law.

Just as the Prodigal Son “*came to himself*” in a far country and resolved to return to his father, so Naomi awakens to her depravity in Moab and resolves to return to the place of Bread and Praise. “*Then she arose with her daughters in law, that she might return from the country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread.*” (Ruth 1:6) Yes, the chastening of the Lord can be very hard. It may remind us of what favor we have left in the House of Bread and Praise to the Lord. Jonah suffered being thrown into the depths of the sea, swallowed by a whale, and being vomited up on dry land before he realized that he could not outrun the Lord.

We, too, often must learn that lesson the hard way. It would be far easier to submit to the Lord and obey His calling rather than kicking against the prods. Paul asked, *Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.* (Acts 9:5) Many good men have tried to escape the Lord's call to no avail. God has been compared to the Hound of Heaven who never loses the trail, the scent of his object, or expires in his dogged pursuit. Sooner or later, the rabbit-like man must stop in exhaustion and do as the Lord commands.

Has God called you to a place of service? Have you decided to sojourn elsewhere believing that the Lord will not notice? Have you found the way hard and the going rough? Did you awaken to memories of the House of Bread and Praise as did Naomi, and begin your return to that favored place in the Heart of God?