

# Our Foundation Is God`s Promise!

Last time we began our walk through the book of Ruth by looking at just one verse: Ruth 1:1.

But first we read of the people`s rededication of themselves to follow and serve God alone in Joshua. He called them to throw away the idols they had cherished, even since coming out of Egypt. The warning to us is that we are so prone to believing everything which is not God, because for the next 325 years, Israel`s chosen judges would come and go. From righteous Othniel to wayward Sampson. Sampson tainted just about every vow before God, which is as a Nazarite, he was called to make and live by. I pointed out the words which marked well those days: Judges 24:25 "In those days Israel had no King, everyone did as he saw fit." And I said that this also describes the times in which we are living! Authority is cast aside. There are no absolutes. Sexual and social depravity reign. Male and female are all but gone, and of course God is cast aside, while every false god is lauded and embraced! And I headed the sermon, 'For a little while; by faith and not by sight'.

V1 "In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land." Today, droughts in Australia. And floods also. And a virus which seems to have everyone terrified. God is telling us all to repent and return to Him. But Elimelech decides to "go to and live for a while in Moab." And also explained that he went there for comfort, to weather the storm of God's judgement upon Israel. Yes he, turned aside, or he turned his back on God "for a while" The tragedy being, that it cost him not only his life, but his eternal soul! Yes times were difficult. But unlike the many who stayed in Judah and waited for God's Hand of blessing to return to His wayward people through repentance, Elimelech, whose name means My God is King, made a tactical decision. Again, he chose to turn aside "for a while", yes he chose to live by sight and not by faith. And as we will see, it would cost him and his family everything!

Ruth 1:2-10: 'Our Foundation Is God's Promise!'

So from Bethlehem, (that place of bread, the future city of David and birthplace of Jesus the Saviour of mankind), to Moab. The descendants of Lot`s incestuous relationship with his eldest daughter! Now when we put it in these terms, it doesn't seem like a wise move. And as we will see, it wasn't on so many levels. V2: "the man's name was Elimelech, his wife's name Naomi, and the name of his two sons were Mahlon and Killion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah." Genesis 49:8-12 "Judah, your brothers will praise you, your hand will be on the neck of your enemies, your father's sons will bow down to you. You are a lion`s cub, O Judah, you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness who dares to rouse him? The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler`s staff from between his feet until it comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his. He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch, he will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes. His eyes will be darker than wine, his teeth whiter than milk." You see, Israel's whole reason for being were the promises of God to redeem His people through the promised Redeemer King. This was another reason why a faithful Jew would not want to leave Bethlehem in Judah.

In Genesis 12:1-3 we read "the Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you, I will make your name great and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse, and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." And then in v12-15 "When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'this is his wife. Then they will kill me but will

let you live. Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you.” When Abraham came to Egypt, the Egyptians saw that she was a very beautiful woman. And when Pharaoh's officials saw her, they praised her to pharaoh, and she was taken into his Palace.”

Yet as we saw last time, the man whose name means ‘my God is king’, decided that for a while at least, he would put aside all of those promises of God because life in Moab, despite the history between the two nations, seemed an easy road for a time. Dear friends, here's the thing: sometimes in his bringing people to himself, God empties them of all of their means and self-sufficiency.

The prodigal son is a clear example. He'd been given all that his heart desired even his inheritance from his father before his dad's death, and as we know he squandered it all on, let's say, ‘wine, women, and song’. Until he finds himself of even being envious of what he was feeding to the pigs. Well, this is what God sometimes does, because contrary to much of popular Christian thought today, the Almighty God, though He is the provider of our earthly needs, He is far more concerned with our eternal future.

Now the name Naomi means ‘full or plentiful’. We will see that this one who was full of family and life before she went away would, by God, be made empty. And then would her journey with God truly begin.

Well through no fault of their own it seems, Naomi with her two sons followed her husband into Moab, then the green land of the enemy. Now I don't know if you notice but in verse one it says that went to live there for ‘a while’. But in verse two ‘they went to Moab and lived there’. And we know that in the ancient languages that when something is repeated it is not simply saying something again, it is adding greater emphasis and weight up on the subject. So it does seem that they have really settled in. The initial plan was simply to see the hard season of God's displeasure out. But now it would appear that they have put down roots. And we know nothing else all this time until verse three: only 5 words, “now Elimelech Naomi's husband died.”

Friends, as it turns out, in the past three weeks I've been to three funerals. Two memorials and one with the body of a teenager present. And at two of those occasions Les Stewart made the comment that with death comes the ultimate statistic: that one out of one dies. Reflecting particularly upon a young life, which for his parents has obviously been taken away too soon, was tremendously sad. Was he a believer when he died? I'm sure his parents hope so, but God only knows. Certainly though, sharing in another's pain as they cry and laugh remembering their loved one face, forces us all to think of our own mortality.

So, an Israelite woman in an enemy's country is forced to live with the consequences of her husband's foolish decision. She was someone who claimed the living God in the midst of an idolatrous world. And now she has no husband. And there was no single mother's pension in Moab for a Jewish widow. Friends, surely the wise thing to do would have been to confess her husband's foolishness, and indeed, her own if she was complicit in the plan, and head back to the land of her people, her birth, and most importantly her God. But that's not what she did. Perhaps though her husband be dead, the bank was still full. The balance still looked good. Surely the reason why she would choose to stay was for the sake of her own pride. Perhaps the thought of going back and facing everyone who had stayed true to God's promised land was too much for her. She'd rather see what God's Providence has for her in Moab. Big mistake.

Brothers and sisters, aren't we so slow to learn at times? Yes, we are so slow to hear what God is saying to us at times. Often we pray for his guidance but we don't want to hear what he is telling us. And we stubbornly stay a foolish course until his whispers become lightning bolts.

Surely the message to Naomi is that God was not pleased with the choice of Moab. Jesus' words recorded in Matthew 23:37-38: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who killed the prophets and stoned those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate." Now, yes, Jesus is speaking here of his people's refusal to hearken to the calling of his servants the prophets, but I believe we can apply these things to our own hardness of heart. You see, God is speaking to us in every situation of life. It's just that we are so hard of hearing because we are not used to hearing the sound of his voice through his word.

"Now Elimelech, Naomi's husband died and she was left with her two sons. They married Moabite women". So this chain of bad decisions continues. Leaving Judah was a bad decision. Going to Moab was an even worse decision. Staying in Moab after Elimelech's death was worse still. But getting or approving Pagan wives for her two sons was the worst decision of all. Does she not remember their history between the two nations? The seducing of the Israelite men by the Moabite women into idolatrous worship? And the centuries of bad blood between the two nations. This was never going to work out well. God was not, and would never be pleased. One daughter-in-law was named Orpah and the other Ruth.

Notice the words: "after they have lived there about 10 years". Surely her husband's 'for a while' by any stretch of the imagination was never have meant to have been 10 years? The question is, why did they stay so long? Well, I suggest, that it is akin to what I was saying last time about our turning our back on God, for a while. The longer we are apart from him Satan's whispers make it harder and harder to return.

In Job 1:6-7, and 1 Peter 5:8 we read, "Beware, your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking souls to devour." Yes, he whispers and eventually those whispers can be all that we hear. Genesis chapter 3 "did God really say?"

So like Lot in Sodom, Naomi lived there for 10 years and it would seem she became more and more enveloped in Moabite life. This is how we are drawn aside, brothers and sisters, from the life and work of the Kingdom of God. Perhaps things for Naomi were now going well. But God would soon speak to her again of His displeasure.

But beloved, let me make it very clear that I'm not suggesting that when someone close to us dies that God is telling us that he is angry or displeased with us. But again, certainly through all things he *is* speaking to us. And for Naomi it is after they had lived there about 10 years: both Marlon and Killian died. Yes brothers and sisters, if we are listening to him, God is speaking to us through every situation. And particularly so the death of a loved one.

Well now for Naomi, the refugee Jewess in a Moabite world, both husband and two sons are dead. And in Jewish culture, the place where someone was buried was very significant. In Genesis 49:29-33 Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca and Rachel are all buried in a particular place. But Naomi, who was full of family and life when she left Bethlehem in Judah, would be forced to leave her husband and two sons buried away from the promised land of God in a foreign, even an enemies land.

Yes, Naomi who was full is now empty. And now her walk with God would truly begin. Yes for Naomi 10 years have passed since the death of her husband, or perhaps 10 years since she left Bethlehem in Judah. Either way what has she to show for it? A dead husband and two dead sons, and perhaps now the cupboard is bare. She is at another crossroads in her life. Even one of those moments, brothers and sisters, which at different times and in different ways that God brings each one of us to.

The question is: which way will we turn? The way ahead for the Lord will be difficult, but it has eternal rewards. The way to the side may seem easy for a while, even temporary relief, but it leads ultimately to death. Jeremiah 6:16: "This is what the Lord almighty says: "Stand at the crossroads and look, ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is and walk in it and you will find rest for your souls"

Jesus himself says, "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest". And David wrote in Psalm 23 "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters, he restores my soul." Yes dear friends, the way ahead might be difficult with many obstacles in our way, but in the midst of the trials Christ is with us, and through those difficulties, even tragedies, he is leading us back to himself.

Naomi and her family believed they were on the easy road, and yet that has led only to tragedy, hardship and death. She has been emptied by God. And although she doesn't know it yet, the Lord in his mercy has begun to fill her again and has given her a gift which, in some ways, far outshines all that she has lost.

Yes beloved, God brings us low sometimes. He may even empty us of all of our self-sufficiency and means before he begins to fill us with himself, and bring us safely home. My brother Ted, before he was saved, God basically burned his house down (not literally but metaphorically) before he brought Ted into his wonderful grace and mercy.

Yes Naomi is at the crossroads; what will she do? Well, verse six: "When she heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, Naomi and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home". Friends, isn't God's Providence amazing? Only now does she get word that the Lord had come to the aid of his people. What wonderful words. Notice that it doesn't just say that she heard there was food in Judah. But that the Lord had come to their aid. There is an acknowledgement here that God had withheld the rain because of the people's sin. And blessing has come again, no doubt due to the people's repentance.

So finally she sees the writing on the wall. Finally she realises that it's time to go home and face the music. It's going to be difficult. It's going to be extremely hard to face all of those who have stayed the test of God's judgement, but she has no choice.

Did you notice what was missing from this family tree? Naomi, with her two daughters-in-law, left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah. When Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the Lord show kindness to you, as you have shown kindness to your dead and to me. May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband. Then she kissed them and I wept aloud and said to her, we will go back with you to your people." Yes do you notice what was missing? There are no grandchildren to mention. During all of those years of marriage not one single child was born in either of her sons' homes. You see again, unlike today, that when someone couldn't conceive they saw it as from the hand of the Lord. So there were no

grandchildren to keep her there. Her choice now has been made easy. No family, no finances, no food. It is time to go home.

But now she is faced with another dilemma, the commentators point out: what to do with her two daughters-in-law? She had no means, though we will see she owned a piece of land but no wherewithal to work the land; no she had no means to support herself. She herself would rely upon charity, let alone two other mouths to feed and clothe. So it seems she goes down the same road that brought her to Moab, and we've seen how that turned out.

Yes she takes the pragmatic approach. After 10 years, send the two women home to their families. She still hasn't learned why she is in these straits. Her husband had chosen to live by sight and not by faith, and now she seems to be doing the same thing. It might seem harsh but it does feel that she is only thinking here about herself. Why not take these two women with her who are so heartbroken at the thought of being separated from their mother-in-law? At least they be together. At least they would continue to be a family of sorts.

But she has a problem you see: they are Moabites. It would be like a Christian woman returning home after 10 years living in a Muslim community with two Muslim daughters-in-law. They are foreigners, not of the people of Israel and worse still, they worship foreign gods. Already she is faced with the stigma of returning home after abandoning the land of God's promises. Yes, returning home with God's hand clearly upon their decision to leave. No husband, no sons, no grandchildren from these unions. To live constantly with the whisperings, 'oh that's Naomi. Oh, they are Moabites you know'.

Perhaps the practical side of her thought it would all be too hard. Brothers and sisters, the road of Jesus is hard. There will always be decisions as Christians which place us at the crossroad. Do we cheat on our taxes? Do we hold on to an honest hours work for an hours pay? Do we love our spouses holding always only to them forsaking all others? If our child falls pregnant, whether they be the mother or father, we tell them it's not the end of the world, but this baby should live?

Again you see, there are two ways to live: by sight or by faith. We live by what we see, or we live by what we being promised. If we choose to live only by what we see, we like Elimelech now back on the promises of God. Beloved, we can't see and touch the Lord Jesus Christ. We must cling only to the promises which he has made in the scriptures since the time of Adam and Eve. That he is God and that there is no other. "In my father's house are many rooms. I go there to prepare a place for you." "I tell you the truth, no eye has seen, no ear as heard, nor mind conceive what God has prepared for those who love him".

Yes, this is what the Almighty says: "Stand at the crossroads and look, ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls."

Well Jesus said, "I am the way".

Let's pray.