

Choosing a Community

Key Verse: *“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**

Selected Scripture:
Ruth 1:8-18

DURING THE PERIOD OF the Judges, Elimelech, Naomi, and their sons, Mahlon and Chilion, left Bethlehem Judah and traveled to Moab to seek sustenance because there was a famine where they lived.

This was an unwise decision. Instead of possibly settling with his Jewish brethren in another section of Israel where perhaps the family’s temporal fortunes might have been better, Elimelech by his actions violated God’s earlier instructions—“An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter

into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD for ever. . . . Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days for ever.”—Deut. 23:3,6

While the family dwelt in Moab, Elimelech died, his sons married Moabite wives and, after ten years, Mahlon and Chilion also died, leaving their mother, Naomi, with two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth.—Ruth 1:3-5

Our Key Verse reveals God’s mercy, as ultimately the famine was removed from Judah and Naomi decided to return to her land alone. Naomi’s daughters-in-law refused to leave her. In Orpah’s case, this was seemingly a polite gesture; but Ruth’s expression was genuine. Naomi

again urged them to depart, noting that Ruth and Orpah should seek to remarry and bear children, while she was too old to marry and bear sons for them to wed. Orpah then took Naomi's advice and returned to her family and her gods, but Ruth vowed, using one of the most beautiful expressions of love recorded in any literature, that under no circumstances would she separate from her mother-in-law. "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."—vss. 10-17

When Naomi returned to Bethlehem with Ruth, the inhabitants of the city were happy to see her again and greeted her cordially by name. She responded by saying not to call her Naomi, which meant "pleasant," but instead to call her Mara, which meant "bitter," for she had been chastised for living in Moab. She explained that she had departed many years ago with her husband and her two sons, and now she had returned empty, as a widow without children.—vss. 19-21

A very important lesson that may be derived from a consideration of this narrative is the value of positiveness in making a decision. Ruth determined that she would make a commitment to go to Judea with her mother-in-law and convert to Judaism. Evidently, the testimony she had received concerning the power, wisdom, justice, and love of the Creator was so forceful that she was willing to forsake everything connected with her former life in Moab to embrace the promises that were given to Israel, who were God's chosen people.—Amos 3:2

During his earthly ministry, Christ set forth the requirements of self-denial and cross bearing for all who desire to be his disciples. (Luke 9:23,24) Let us each manifest the same determination to follow our Master as Ruth demonstrated in leaving Moab and accompanying Naomi back to Judea because of her love and desire to serve the God of Israel. ■