

# Handfuls On Purpose

## Studies in the Book of Ruth

### Chapter One

## Running Away From God

“<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> And Elimelech Naomi’s husband died; and she was left, and her two sons. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> 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).

Ruth is a wonderful little book of four chapters detailing the life of a woman named Ruth. Although it represents an accurate history of a period of about 11 years, it is also a book of types represented by the individual characters in the book.

The book of Ruth gives us the first hint of the Church Age in the Old Testament represented by Ruth, the gentile bride of Boaz (who is a type of Christ, our kinsman Redeemer). Naomi represents the nation of Israel under chastisement and later, restoration and blessing.

In Ruth 1:1 we see the historical setting to be “in the days when the Judges ruled” (or judged). The Midrash (Rabbinical commentaries) makes Ruth a daughter of the Moabite king Eglon who was killed by Ehud in the first 100 years of the period of the Judges. However, Josephus (the Jewish historian at the time of Christ) places Boaz as a contemporary with Eli which would put the events of the book of Ruth at the end of the book of Judges, about 300 years after the entrance into the Promised Land under Joshua (this seems the most probable). This is important in order to understand the overall spiritual climate of the nation of Israel during this historical period.

First, in order to understand the purpose of the “famine in the land” of Ruth 1:1, we need to go back to Judges 2:11-18 to see the four phase sin cycle of each succeeding generation of Israel.

“<sup>11</sup> And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim: <sup>12</sup> And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that *were* round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger. <sup>13</sup> And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth. <sup>14</sup> And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies. <sup>15</sup> Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed. <sup>16</sup> Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them. <sup>17</sup> And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the LORD; *but* they did not so. <sup>18</sup> And when the LORD raised them up judges, then the LORD was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge: for it repented the LORD because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them” (Judges 2:11-18).

### **Phase One of the Sin Cycle: Judges 2:11-13**

This phase begins with apathy and complacency towards the things of God and His expectations of holiness and purity ending with the intermixing of pagan worship and worldly practices with the things of God. Eventually this progression would end with “forsaking” or abandoning the Lord (v 12) and accepting total paganism and worldliness as each generation allowed a little more of God’s absolutes to slip through their fingers.

### **Phase Two of the Sin Cycle: Judges 2:14**

Once they began to move away from purity and holiness (separation), God’s chastisement would come upon them to the degree necessary to turn them back to Him and His truths (repentance). In Ruth the chastisement is in the form of famine which is a lesser degree of chastisement than a conquering and oppressive nation that would attack, steal and destroy their possessions, ravage their wives and daughters and enslave those left alive. In this second phase, God’s hand of protection and blessing is withdrawn. It was God’s intention to prove to His people that they could not survive without His help.

### **Phase Three of the Sin Cycle: Judges 2:18**

Once the people were under chastisement, oppressed and put into slavery, they would begin to *remember* the God they professed to know and worship. They would begin to cry out to Him in prayerful repentance. God would hear their cries and groanings and have mercy on them.

### **Phase Four of the Sin Cycle: Judges 2:16**

In this phase, God would raise up Judges to deliver them out of bondage and lead them back to righteousness, holiness and purity. According to Judges 2:19, we find the repetition of this cycle throughout the book of Judges and throughout the Old Testament. (It is also true of New Testament believers as well.)

“And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, *that* they returned, and corrupted *themselves* more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way” (Judges 2:19).

However, notice the progressive increase in wickedness with each repeat of the sin cycle. This tendency continues today. This is why each succeeding generation needs to be taught the same historic truths of God and commit themselves to obey and keep them. The tendency is to invite the world and its corruptions into the home and into the church. When that happens, the Christian (individually) and the Church (corporately) begin to lose their distinctiveness and their power with God (separation from the world is critical to power with God). That is why there is a constant battle for each new generation in the Church. When Moms and Dads begin to become soft on the things of God, they are sealing the fate of their children under God’s chastisement.

**We find another point important to our understanding of the book of Ruth in the last verse of the Book of Judges.**

“In those days *there was* no king in Israel: every man did *that which was* right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25).

Ruth 1:1-5 represents the consequences of Judges 21:25. The people of Israel were very much like the people of the Churches of today. They wanted God’s blessing and provision for them, but not His authority over them. They wanted God to be accountable to them, but they did not want to be accountable to Him. They wanted a distant God when it came to their unfaithful practices, but a near God when it came to their wants and needs. They wanted God to be a faithful husband to them, while they were an unfaithful wife to Him.

These things magnify the great contrast between Judges 21:25 and the name Elimelech of Ruth 1:1. Elimelech means *God is my King*. That was the testimony of Israel, but it was a lie. It was the farthest thing from the truth of their lives (practices).

“<sup>7</sup> Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, <sup>8</sup> This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me” (Matthew 15:7-8).

Just like the Christians of today who say *Jesus is Lord*, it didn't mean anything to them. It is like the pick-up truck I saw in a parking lot one day. On one side of the bumper was a bumper sticker saying *Jesus Is Lord*. On the same bumper on the other side was a bumper sticker promoting the right to abort babies.

**In Ruth 1:1, Israel is in the second phase of the sin cycle. Famine is in the land.** God's chastisement is upon Israel to turn their hearts back to Him. Elimelech sees it as a small inconvenience and decides to “sojourn in the country of Moab.” (“Sojourn” refers to a short visit.) The problem is that Elimelech was trying to escape the chastisement of God. That is not possible.

The word “Bethlehemjudah” means the *house of bread in the land of praise*. At this point in history there was no bread in the *house of bread* because there was no genuine praise in the *land of praise*. Instead of stopping and evaluating the change that was needed (repentance), Elimelech takes his family, leaves the *house of bread* in the *land of praise* and heads for Moab.

Moab was a wicked, Baalistic nation which descended from one of the two sons of the incestuous relationship of Lot with his two daughters (Ammon was the other son who was the father of the Ammonites). It is apparent that, although Lot got his two daughters out of Sodom, he never got Sodom out of his daughters and they transferred the wickedness of Sodom too their two sons. God would use Moab to turn the heart of Israel back to Him.

“Moab *is* my washpot {lit., boiling caldron for cleansing}; over Edom will I cast out my shoe; over Philistia will I triumph” (Psalm 108:9).

Moab was to be used of God as a cleansing place, where God would bring Israel (typified by Naomi) face to face with the cause of her chastisement. God wanted Israel to change the *way* they lived. Instead, like a rebellious teen-ager, they ran away from home to avoid God's chastisement and only changed the *place* they lived.

Changing the place they lived couldn't change their ways or restore them to the place of blessing and happiness. They needed a change of heart, not a change of place. We cannot proclaim God to be King (Lord) and at the same time be having a love affair with the world.

“<sup>15</sup> Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. <sup>16</sup> For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. <sup>17</sup> And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (I John 2:15-17).

When the happiness and joy of your Christianity is gone and chastisement is upon you, to try to run away from God is a dangerous thing to do. It was in running away from God's fixed place (where God had put them) that showed how unfaithful Israel was to their testimony (God is my King). God spanked them. Instead of repenting and seeking forgiveness and reconciliation, they ran away from home. Things don't change much, do they?

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1. Ruth is a historical book representing about an 11 year period of history during the period of the Judges. It also is a book of types.

A. Who is Ruth typical of? \_\_\_\_\_

B. Who is Boaz typical of? \_\_\_\_\_

C. Who is Naomi typical of? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Why is it important to understand the chronological period of the book of Ruth? \_\_\_\_\_

3. The reason behind the *famine in the land* of Ruth 1:1 is detailed in the four phase Sin Cycle of Judges 2:11-18. Detail these four phases.

A. **Phase One**, Judges 2:11-13: \_\_\_\_\_

How does this truth apply to your life? \_\_\_\_\_

B. **Phase Two**, Judges 2:14: \_\_\_\_\_

How does this truth apply to your life? \_\_\_\_\_

C. **Phase Three**, Judges 2:18: \_\_\_\_\_

How does this truth apply to your life? \_\_\_\_\_

D. **Phase Four**, Judges 2:16: \_\_\_\_\_

How does this truth apply to your life? \_\_\_\_\_

4. What does Judges 2:19 tell us about the repetition of this sin cycle in progressive generations? \_\_\_\_\_

5. What must we **do** for our children in order to help them avoid this sin cycle in their generation? \_\_\_\_\_

6. What must we **be** for our children in order to help them avoid this sin cycle in their generation? \_\_\_\_\_

7. What about Judges 21:25 is reflected by the consequences of Ruth 1:1-5? \_\_\_\_\_

8. What is the contrast of Judges 21:25 with the meaning of the name *Elimelech* in Ruth? \_\_\_\_\_

9. When Israel professed God to be their King, was that a truth manifested by the way they lived? \_\_\_\_\_
10. In what way is it similar today, when many Christians profess that Jesus is Lord? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. Why does God chastise His children? Is it intended to punish them? What is the purpose of chastisement? \_\_\_\_\_
12. What does the word “sojourn” mean in Ruth 1:1? \_\_\_\_\_
13. What was Elimelech trying to do in regard to God’s chastisement by going to Moab? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
14. What is a literal translation of the word “Bethlehemjudah“? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
15. From whom did the nation of Moab descend and why were they so wicked? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
16. From Psalm 108:9, what does the word “washpot” mean and how does that relate to what God would do with the family of Elimelech in Moab? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
17. God wanted Israel to change the \_\_\_\_\_ they lived. Instead, they ran away from God’s chastisement and only changed the \_\_\_\_\_ they lived.
18. We cannot proclaim God to be our King, and be having a love \_\_\_\_\_ at the same time with the world.
19. How does I John 2:15 confirm the statement of your answer to the above question? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
20. Do you think Christians ever *run away from home* when they come under chastisement? \_\_\_\_\_  
A. Do you think that this is a spiritually mature thing to do? \_\_\_\_\_  
B. Do you think that the person who would do so understands the principle of Biblical discipline? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_