

DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

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Twenty-Seventh Week - Tuesday

NAOMI RETURNS HOME

"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 Bethlehem in Judah went to dwell in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. . . . Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left, and her two sons. Now they took wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth. And they dwelt there about ten years. Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died; so the woman survived her two sons and her husband. 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 that Yahweh had visited His people by giving them bread" (Ruth 1:1-6).

At the end of ten years, of the four persons who went to the land of Moab to preserve their existence, one only remained alive and that was Naomi. Observing that the law of the old covenant contained promises of unending subsistence to those who trusted in God, it is held that the more faithful action for them would have been to remain in the land of Judah, trusting the Lord for their sustenance. As it is, Elimelech and his family left the land of the Lord's inheritance to avoid famine but found death instead in the land of their choice.

Some venture to suggest that the judgment of premature death--and that childless--was inflicted upon the sons partly on account of their marriages, which were affirmed to have been unlawful under any circumstances. It seems, indeed, that the two sons of Naomi may have shown their disdain for this law by taking wives for themselves in opposition to the custom where the father or mother provided wives for them, as Hagar did for Ishmael. "They took them wives" is a phrase that usually occurs in a bad sense, as an act done without the concurrence of the parents. The inference is that they acted against the wishes of Naomi, who contemplated a return home that a marriage in the land of their nativity among the daughters of their own people could be arranged.

Now nine or ten years is too short a span of time to deaden the love of home and country in persons of advanced years. But to those around twenty years of life, like Mahlon and Chilion, the last ten years is by far the most important of their existence. Thus, Moab rather than Israel may very well have been regarded by them as their real home. The offense of the sons of Naomi, if they offended at all, seems to have lain rather in this than in their marriages

themselves. The death of her sons, however disastrous, enabled Naomi to gratify her heart's longing to return home.

It is stated that Naomi "had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had visited His people by giving them bread." It does not follow from this that the famine had lasted all the ten years of her absence. Ten successive years of famine would, we think, destroy any nation. Neither does the phrase imply that although the famine had ceased, ten years had elapsed before she heard of it. Rather, the statement seems to be made in order to account for the circumstance that having now concluded to return home, the famine which had occasioned the departure of the family no longer offered any obstacle seeing that it had sometime before ceased. It is certain that when she arrived back home there were no signs of recent scarcity but rather of such prosperity as would hardly have existed had the harvest then in progress been the first good harvest of the ten years.

It was the intention of Naomi to return alone. But as friends and relations are accustomed to do, her two daughters-in-law went part of the way with her to see her off. But when the moment of parting came, when they kissed each other and wept together, both girls declared that they could not return but would go to the land of Israel with her. Like a wise woman, Naomi declined to take advantage of this impulse of passionate regret, which seemed adverse to their temporal welfare (and which their cooler judgment might not sanction). She thus urged them by many strong arguments to return to their parents. Once more they wept, but Orpah was prevailed upon and gave Naomi the farewell kiss.

Ruth, however, remained, and once more Naomi renewed her arguments with her. But in her heart Ruth had a keen sense of her mother-in-law's forlorn condition. She knew that Naomi could not help but remember how she had been accompanied by a worthy husband and two hopeful sons when she last passed this way, only to now return home alone having left those she loved behind in a foreign grave. Ruth could not abandon her under these circumstances. Her reply to Naomi is beautiful beyond expression, in the tenderness with which the firm purpose of an affectionate heart is expressed: "Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. Yahweh do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me."

Surely this simple eloquence of the lips that speaks from the abundance of the heart never found more beautiful and touching expression