

A QUESTION OF INTEGRITY

Ruth 1:15-18

INTRODUCTION

- A. The picture from Judges – Israel is in deep trouble.
 - 1. Breakdown of moral standards and religious practice.
 - 2. Most had left Jehovah and turned to idol worship.
 - 3. At least 8 references made to Israelites forsaking God for Canaanite gods.
 - 4. Even the Levites were engaged in some form of idolatry (Jdgs. 17:5ff).
 - 5. Israel was plagued with civil war.
 - 6. Stories of deception, murder, rape and immorality, human sacrifice and human slaughter.
 - 7. Constant refrain, *“Again, the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord...”*, vs. 10.
- B. It is in this setting the story of Ruth unfolds.
 - 1. Ruth 1:1, *“In the days when the judges ruled.”*
 - 2. A family moves from Bethlehem to Moab in search of food.
 - 3. The story of one woman’s piety and personal integrity.
- C. The woman Ruth.
 - 1. A native of Moab and daughter-in-law to Naomi.
 - 2. In the midst of a pig-sty of immorality, a pearl of virtue and dignity, from a foreigner!
 - 3. Rightness before God based on individual’s heart, NOT genealogy or nationality.
 - 4. Ruth is in the family tree of both David and the Messiah to come.

I. THE SETTING FOR INTEGRITY.

- A. Setting the Stage, Ruth 1:1-5.
 - 1. Naomi – the female counterpart of Job?
 - 2. There is a famine in Israel.
 - a. No specific period of famine mentioned in Judges.
 - b. Jdg. 6:3-6 does mention the deprivation brought on by war and the marauding invaders of neighboring lands.
 - 3. The family of Elimelech moves from Bethlehem to Moab.
 - 4. Tragedy strikes the family:
 - a. Elimelech dies, leaving Naomi a widow, 1:3.
 - b. Naomi’s two sons subsequently marry, but they too die within 10 years of their move to Moab, 1:4-5.
- B. The Plight of Widows in Ancient Times.
 - 1. There was no such thing as Social Security in that time.
 - a. The health and wellbeing of women in ancient economies revolved around their connection with men.
 - i. Girls were protected by their father’s house.
 - ii. Wives survived by the labor of their husbands.
 - iii. One reason having sons was so vital in those days – widows were supported by their sons in old age.
 - b. Naomi had neither father nor husband nor son to take care of her.

2. Widows in Naomi's condition were literally reduced to begging. They lived in poverty on the mercy of others.
 - a. God's provision for the care of widows and orphans.
 - i. Caring for widows was mark of special godliness among the Jews.
 - ii. The gleanings provision [aliens, orphans, widows] – Deut. 24:19-22.
 - b. At best, however, the widow's life was hard. Examples from N.T. times:
 - i. The widow's mite, Mk. 12:41-44.
 - ii. Collection for widows, Acts 6:1.
 - iii. Roll of widows, 1 Tim. 5:3ff.

II. THE DECISION FOR INTEGRITY.

- A. Naomi Looks to the Future, 1:6-13.
 1. The outlook for her is bleak.
 - a. She is both widowed and without sons, no one to provide for her and her daughters-in-law.
 - b. She is too old to offer any prospects for the future.
 - c. You get the feeling that she is simply going home to die, "*The Lord's hand has gone out against me*", v. 13.
 2. Her daughters-in-law still have some options.
 - i. They are still young and marriageable.
 - ii. They will be better off to return home and, some day, "*find rest in the home of another husband*", v. 9.
- B. The Response of Her Daughters-in-law.
 1. Orpah returns "*to her people and her gods*", vs. 14-15.
 - a. She sees Naomi's point and heeds her advice.
 - b. Don't condemn her for obeying her mother-in-law.
 2. Ruth decides to care for her mother-in-law.
 - a. She knows what the future holds for Naomi.
 - b. She knows also what the future with Naomi holds for her.
 3. We see in Ruth a personal courage and integrity that is absent among God's people. She determines her course not on the basis of what is comfortable or convenient but on the basis of what is good and honorable, Ruth 1:16-18.

III. THE COST OF INTEGRITY.

- A. Hard Days in Bethlehem.
 1. Naomi goes home, accompanied by her daughter-in-law, Ruth 1:19-21.
 - a. From "Pleasant" (Naomi) to "Bitter" (Mara).
 - b. From "full" to "empty".
 2. Ruth goes to work, supporting her mother-in-law.
 - a. Taking advantage of God's provision for the destitute.
 - i. Gleaning in the fields of Boaz, 2:2-3.
 - ii. Following the reapers to pick up leftovers.
 - iii. Threshing the grain for food and sale.
 - b. She works hard and long, 2:6-7, 17.
 - i. Everyday she went to the fields.
 - ii. She worked long hours.

- iii. This lasted for 2-3 months, vs. 23.
- B. Right Choices are Not Always Easy to Live With.
 - 1. Ruth could have been safe in her father's house.
 - 2. Instead, she does manual labor in the fields of a stranger.
 - 3. The reason, 2:11-12.

IV. THE REWARD OF INTEGRITY.

- A. Romance in the Grain Fields.
 - 1. Boaz shows interest in Ruth, 2:5ff.
 - a. He feeds her lunch, 2:14.
 - b. He orders reapers to leave grain behind, 2:15-16.
 - c. He invites her to stay in his fields where she will be safe, 2:8-9.
 - 2. Ruth shows interest in Boaz, 3:1ff. She proposes to him at the threshing floor.
 - a. Spreading the covering [skirt], symbolic of marriage proposal.
 - b. God did so for the Israelites, Ezek. 16:8.
 - 3. They marry and live happily ever after.
- B. God Takes Care of Those who Walk Honorably Before Him.
 - 1. Ruth 4:13-17
 - 2. Boaz gets a wife.
 - 3. Ruth gets a husband.
 - 4. Naomi "has a son" to sustain her in her old age, 4:15.

CLOSING

- A. So many of us run our lives like a business.
 - 1. We make decision on the basis of what seems to give the best return.
 - 2. We wheel and deal with life hoping to hit jackpot.
 - 3. Very often, it is our morals and integrity that are the first things to go in this business.
- B. We would never think of behaving like Ruth.
 - 1. She made a bad decision – acting with no prospects of profit.
 - 2. We would have been like Orpah – Play it safe, go for the sure thing.
- C. Maybe it's time to let God run our lives.
 - 1. Our task in life is to live with integrity.
 - 2. It is God's task to make things come out to our god.