

ELIMELECH, THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

“ 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 Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons. 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 Bethlehem Judah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there.” (Ruth 1:1-2)

Ruth is a most remarkable book for a number of reasons: It provides a valuable historical link in the human lineage of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is cherished by many as a beautiful love story, but it is much, much more than that. Every person who appears in the book is carefully named, with one exception, and that exception is highly significant. Practically every name as well as every event unmistakably bears an undeniable theological significance. The book's location in the Bible is before First and Second Samuel, introducing First and Second Kings, and its ascribed time is “when the judges ruled”. This, the most infamous and disorderly period of all Hebrew history, is aptly described 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.”* Now, that would be, according to most people's private thinking, a wonderful state to live under. People do not like government. They do not like authorities ordering their lives, telling them what to do and what not to do, especially if those orders are contrary to their own wills. They had much rather do what they themselves think is right in their own eyes. Well, God has given us a book with a record of what happens in such an ungoverned society. The result is striking and unvarying: Judges 2:11: *“And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord . . .”*. Chapter 3, vs. 7: *“And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the lord.”* The refrain continues all through the book: chapter 4, vs. 1, chapter 6, vs. 1, chapter 13, vs. 1. Not once, in this book during the time it is said there was no King in Israel, and every man is doing what is right in his own eyes, is it said that what they did was right in the sight of God. No, on the contrary, a principle is established here that when men are ungoverned, when there is no Sovereign on the throne of their hearts and lives, they always do evil in the sight of God. It would seem that we are being taught that every man needs a King to tell him what is right and wrong and what he ought do and ought not do. That is utterly contrary to our self-willed rebellious nature. We are born into this world, angry that we have been disturbed from the nice comfortable womb we have been wallowing in, red faces, fists clenched and yelling our lungs out in protest! And that rebel heart will not be brought under submission until the Lord of Glory has been enthroned in our hearts and there is a “King in Israel”.

The first key doctrines to be set forth in the book of Ruth are the doctrine of God and the doctrine of man. They are both bound up in the name of this man, Elimelech. This name is compounded from two words. The first is “Eli”, which means “my God”. The second is “melech”, which means “is king”. My God is King!

God's answer to Moses' inquiry as to who he should tell the children of Israel had sent him was, “I AM”. That is the phrase that succeeds to us as “Jehovah” or “Yahweh”. It is a very good beginning of understanding the doctrine of God. He is the God who IS. He is therefore made distinct from every other god who is not! “Is” is present tense, but there never was a time in the past or shall be a time in the future when it cannot be said of God, “HE IS”. He is the ever present One, never absent in time, but standing outside of time. He precedes and succeeds all other existence, and all that exists proceeds from Him. He transcends all things in the universe. He is the Basis, the Origin and Fountain of all truth, all morality, righteousness and justice. Absolutes find their being in His Person.

God is King, the single absolute Ruler of all. The word “Sovereign” finds its reality in Him alone. We call earthly kings sovereign, but they are not absolutely free to do as they will. God is absolutely free, is bound to counsel no one, to be guided or ordered by any power outside Himself in all that He does. He was sovereign in creation. No one else was present to counsel, order, or influence Him. Everything exists as it is solely because He made it so. He is sovereign in human government and in all heavenly powers (Dan. 4:25,35). He is sovereign in salvation (II Thess. 2:13). Every person who is ever saved is saved because God freely chose to save them. He is sovereign in all eventualities and circumstances (Eph. 1:11). He is sovereign ruler of all creatures, both rational and irrational; they all do His will irrespective of their knowledge or ignorance of Him. He also holds all the material universe, every particle of every element, as well as the whole infinite expanse, in the palm of His hand (Heb. 1:3).

The sovereignty of God is not an objective academic subject which we can contemplate and avoid becoming personally involved in. The God Who is King is my God, and He is my King. If I am to live at peace in His universe, then I must live under His absolute dominion. That is one reason why the Bible speaks so much about the “Kingdom of God” and the Kingdom of Heaven”. Christianity is not a republic or democracy, but a kingdom with a King at its head. We who live in the U.S.A., as well as most industrialized nations today, have no idea what it is to live under a totalitarian government where one person, a king, emperor, or dictator is in absolute authority. And that is a very good thing, because such earthly rulers are practically always evil, oppressive men. But that is not the case with our King and the Kingdom of God. Nevertheless, modern evangelism has been emptied of its sanctifying power by removing the Lordship of Christ, and the reality of the Kingdom of God from the gospel. People “accept” a Savior, but reject a King, and are left still unregenerate. Let me draw some contrasts between a democracy and a kingdom that will help us understand the radical nature of Christian conversion.

In a democracy such as the U.S.A., there are three branches of government, the legislative branch which makes laws, the judicial branch which interprets laws, and the executive branch which enforces laws. Recognizing the imperfections in men, these three branches are supposed to “check and balance” each other. A bad law may be corrected by the judicial. Bad judges may be brought under reign by the executive. All of these are elected by the people, so ultimately this is supposed to effect a government of the people, by the people, for the people. It also bears a remarkable resemblance to the ruinous state of things in the book of Judges,

when there was no king in Israel and everyone did what was right in his own eyes. We have already noted that when men do that, what they do is evil in the eyes of the LORD. God's government is not like that at all. It is described in *Isaiah 33:22: For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; he will save us.* Our salvation is not in our own hands: it is in the hands of the LORD. My God is King.

America, on the other hand, is the place where the "American dream" can come true. Every man can do what is right in his own eyes, providing he stays within the wide boundaries of a constitution and legal system which guarantees every person's right to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." A Bill of Rights holds the government at bay, but it is every man for himself. Every person is responsible for how well he does and how successful he is. The smartest, strongest, fastest and most devious can climb over everyone else to the top. He who get there can take all the credit for his success. He not only gets all the goodies, but he gets the glory for accomplishing it. Self esteem is thought to be the key to life in its fullness. Confidence in the flesh is the battle cry of the democracy. Anything is possible if you know what you want, make up your mind you are going to get it, and go after it. Goals, objectives to be obtained, are absolute necessities to keep energies focused. The whole of life is driven by a resolute "I will". But in the Kingdom of God those two words are at the root of everything evil and contrary to the Name of God. In fact, "I will" is the essence of sin. It is the expression of resolve declared by Lucifer, who thereby became the devil and the enemy of our souls. "*For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.*" (*Isaiah 14:13-14*).

Not so is the Kingdom of God. "*For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.*" (*Phil. 3:3*). Our will has been lost in God's will, and all we do is qualified by, "the Lord willing". Only one person is responsible to accomplish anything in a kingdom. That person is the king. The responsibilities of the subjects are all gathered into one phrase, "Obey the king." The king fights all the battles, gets all the glory for those won, and takes the blame for those lost. The Bible reports King David's wars with the Philistines in this manner. He is said to go out on such a time, engage the enemy, kill so many thousands and take their territory. Now, it was not David, but David's men who actually did all the fighting, killing and taking. But they did it all in obedience to their king, so it was the king who got the job done and the glory for it. Had the battle been lost, his army decimated, and their territory lost, it would have been the king who took the blame for it.

The same is true of Solomon's building of the temple. The Bible gives specific details of how and what Solomon did in constructing the temple and all its furnishings. No one, for a second, believes that the king took his tools and his own hands and built that temple. But the scriptures plainly declare that Solomon made a sea of brass, *he* made chapiters, *he* made golden basins and spoons, *he* laid the stones in place. We know quite well that it is the king's subjects doing these things. But they were doing all this work under the king's orders and in obedience to his instructions.

Suppose that I am a stone cutter, and the king employs me to work on the temple. I know how to cut stone, have been at it a long time. I am skilled and know all the best techniques. I have also studied architecture and know how stones ought to be fitted together. The king hands me a blueprint, and says, "Cut this stone according to these dimensions." I ask him, "Where are you going to put that stone?" He answers, "It's none of your business where I'm going to put it. Just cut it exactly according to this drawing." Well, I look all around, and wonder, "Where is this thing going to fit?" I look at another fellow and say, "Let me see your blueprint. What are *you* cutting? I am trying to find out where this thing is supposed to fit." I look at another man's work and say, "I don't think your work is going to fit with my work." After finding out everything I can about what everyone else is doing, I come to the conclusion that something is wrong with what I have been told to do. I know the king is wise, but after all, he is a king, not a stone cutter. So I come to the conclusion that in order to do a good job and do it right, I will have to disobey the king and alter my stone according to my superior knowledge. The consequences? Two. The first is, the stone will not fit. The second is, my head will be chopped off.

What would have been my alternative? Obey the king! If the stone does not fit, it will be the king who is to blame, for I have worked according to his word and his will. I do not have to do a good job and make everything fit properly. That is not my job. My sole responsibility is to obey the King. This King has never been wrong! As a citizen in a kingdom, a subject of the King, living in obedience to the King, I cannot fail, therefore, I do not have to fear humiliation. Neither can I succeed, therefore I do not have to worry about strutting and bragging about what I accomplished. I have only two alternatives; obey or disobey the king. If what I do turns out right, the king gets all the glory; if it turns out wrong, the only one embarrassed is the king.

Now, you know that Jesus has never been embarrassed about anything. Everything He ever did turned out exactly right. His disciples did not always think what He was doing made good sense, but when everything was finished and settled, His wisdom and power prevailed. But we who are accustomed to living in a democracy like to have our own input. We feel like our opinions, our objectives, and our will ought to be taken into consideration. That is the mentality that drove the rebellion in the Garden, and is the essence of sin. The "apple" the devil offered was knowledge of right and wrong, independent of God. Man foolishly thought that he would be better off being his own god, rather than being dependent upon the LORD. That is precisely the problem we have entering the Kingdom of God.

Let us consider an illustration. Let us suppose I am a native of Arizona, and have lived here all my life. Arizona is a democracy. Everyone votes on all the laws and elected officials, and the majority rules. Everyone decides what he will do, learns

how to do it, and makes his own living. Some who study, sacrifice and work hard do very well. Others, not so smart or able, do poorly. Every person decides where he wants to live, buys or builds his own house to suit himself and lives in it. We have laws and policemen, judges, lawyers and courts. They never please everybody, some please nobody, but it is the best we can do.

But we hear that over in California, they have a dictator, a king. We feel rather badly for those people, for they do not have the rights and freedoms we have in our democracy. But we keep hearing rumors that these Californians actually like their setup. Some of them come over here talking about how wonderful it is in California. They tell us that there is no fighting, quarrelling, no theft, no murder. People walk safely on the streets, doors are left unlocked, and nothing is stolen or damaged. Marriages are more stable, children grow up courteous, obedient, diligent, and mature into responsible adults. There are no wrangling, hostilities, mud slinging and railing in elections, no transitions in government, because the same person is in charge all the time.

At the same time, things are not going too well for me in the republic. No matter who we elect, he turns out to be untrustworthy, betraying his promises, each doing worse than his predecessors. Laws are constantly being passed which are supposed to fix things, but they are poorly interpreted and enforced; and lawyers and judges always find ways to subvert them. Jobs, employment and the economy in general are disappointing. No matter how much money I make, it isn't enough, and I am always having to watch my back, because someone is going to take advantage of me. Life becomes miserable and dreary. I get to thinking about California, leaving here and moving there. But this King business scares me. Lose all my rights? Have to obey everything the King says? Suppose I don't like it there. I will have made a bad decision, will have to admit I was wrong and will have to return to Arizona, humiliated, broke, and start all over again. So I decide to stick it out and stay here in Arizona. But things

get worse and worse, and after awhile, I have had enough. I cannot live here any longer, fighting a losing battle, when there is a promise and expectation of all my needs being met by simply trusting this King over in California.

So I settle all my Arizona business, liquidate all my assets, pack up all my belongings, everything I will need to make my life safe and comfortable in California, and head for the state line. I stop at the inspection station and am greeted by the border guard, who asks me where I am going, and what is my business. I reply that I have been an Arizona resident all my life, but now wish to transfer my citizenship to California. He looks over the moving van, and finds my guard dogs, as well as the guns and knives which I always keep near to protect myself. "You cannot bring these into California," he says, They will have to stay here." "But I must have them to defend myself." "The King will take care of that," the guard replies, "He personally protects and defends all His subjects. What are those papers you have?" "Oh, these are my insurance policies. I need them to protect my person, my belongings, my health, all that I have against any kind of loss or lawsuits." "The King fully insures all His people and settles all lawsuits. He frees them from all worry and anxieties that arise from fear of loss. And as far as your personal wealth is concerned, your reception into California is conditioned on your surrender of all that to the King." "But I will need a place to live, clothes to wear, food to eat," I protest. "Oh, the King furnishes all of that for all His citizens," He replies. "But perhaps I will not like the food He gives me, the house He provides me, or the neighborhood it's in." "We have never had a dissatisfied citizen," he replies, "Look around." I look around, and, sure enough, everyone has broad smiles, happy, contented faces, and well-fed bodies.

This sort of thing can and often does go on for hours, days, sometimes years. Many, unable to trust the King, turn around and go back; they never enter in. "*Straight is the gate and narrow is the way that leads to life, and few there be who find it.*" But everyone who enters the Kingdom of Heaven, enters under these qualifications. This is the true doctrine, and this is the way God intended man to live: in complete, restful, sweet, submissive dependence upon the Lord, the King. "*And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.*" (Gal. 5:24).

Elimelech is the doctrine of God. My God is King, and it is most glorious good news to the weary pilgrim struggling to survive in this sin-cursed world. It takes all the sweat out of the curse. I do not have to strive to accomplish anything. The King is the only one Who can get anything done. I do not worry about failure, whether or not the King is pleased with my works. He is pleased with my faith and confidence in Him. I do not have to excel, to have something to boast in. All glory belongs to Him. This is indeed a blessed entry into His rest.

- C. M