

## God's Prevenient Grace

*“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 land 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 to the country of Moab, and continued there. And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left and her two sons. 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. And Mahlon and Chilion died also, both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband. The 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 the Lord had visited His people in giving them bread. (Ruth 1:1-6)*

*“And it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi? And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty.” (Ruth 1:19-21)*

In the scheme of redemption, God is always prevenient; He acts creatively first and before-hand, anticipating the redemptive need before sin is ever on the horizon of time. Man, on the other hand, in the scheme of sin and the Fall, always acts first in unbelief and disobedience. God's anticipation of man's failure does not preempt it, although He may, and it is within the Divine prerogative to do so. But He chose to make man a free agent, not a puppet, which would nullify the reality of his existence and meaning. When man appears on the scene of creation, the two first recorded acts of both God and man set the pattern: God said, “Let us make man in our image...and let him have dominion”(Gen. 1:26) “And the Lord God commanded the man”(Gen. 2:16). Contrast that with the first act of man. In brazen defiance of God's command, “she took of the fruit thereof and did eat, and gave to her husband also, and he did eat;”(Gen.3:6). The consequence of this rebellion, however, did not take God by surprise, or set Him scrambling to find a means of redemption. Before He declared the death penalty for sin, He had a Lamb, slain before the foundation of the world, and a redemption that was given to us in Christ Jesus before the world began (II Tim.1-9).

Note how clearly and vividly this principal is declared by Naomi: “I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again, empty.” (**I** went out: **The Lord** hath brought me home) Elimelech's contribution to the scheme of redemption was to leave the house of bread where God had placed him, and go down to the land of Moab where he and all his posterity died. All that is left of his house and his name now is his desolate widow and two, likewise desolated, daughters-in-law. It will be profitable, at this point to explore the redemptive significance of Moab and discover how “The Lord has brought Naomi home empty”.

We read in Genesis 12:1-4 that God called one man, Abraham. God never calls a group, a committee or a board. One man, one mind, one voice, is sufficient to act and do His will. Abraham was specifically instructed to leave his people, his father's house and all kindred. He almost but not quite, obeyed, for one orphaned nephew, Lot, went with him. Lot proved to be a thorn in the flesh to Abraham wherever he went, and the promised land never materialized until Abraham separated himself from Lot. Spiritually understood, Lot represents the flesh and Abraham the spirit, which two are always in opposition. In the separation Lot chooses the lush green pastures of the Jordan valley where Sodom lay to the east, and Abraham took the western rocky uplands of Mamre. After the separation however, the Lord assures Abraham that he has lost nothing of which he had been promised. As far as he could see, in every direction, all would be his and his people's forever...including what Lot has taken.

In the course of time, Sodom and Gomorrah became so wicked that God sent fire and brimstone on the city, destroying every thing that breathed. It was only through the persistent intercession of Abraham that Lot escaped with his wife and two unmarried daughters. Despite the fact that the angel of the Lord warned them to flee to the mountains and not look back, Lot's wife looked back and was transformed into a pillar of salt, leaving only Lot and his two virgin daughters who escaped to a cave. We must remember now, that God had promised a seed and a nation to Abraham, the spiritual man; but to Lot, the fleshy man He promised no descendant at all. The destruction of all Lot's married daughters and his wife should have been accepted as God's good will. But the daughters of Lot, ignorant of the word of God, thought it necessary to produce a descendant. So they got their father drunk and slept with him, both conceiving in unlawful incest. Two sons were born: The youngest named her son Ben-ammi, and he became the progenitor of the

Ammonites, the fierce enemies of later Israel and a continual thorn in her side. The oldest named her son Moab, patriarch of the Moabites. Moab also was numbered among perpetual enemies of God's people. Here are a people appearing on the scene of redemption who have no promises of God. They do not participate in the glory of His Name, and it seems the world might have been better off without them. But nothing takes God by surprise. There never has been a time or an event that was not encompassed by Romans 8:28. How, then, does Moab fit into God's scheme of things for His people? Psalm 60:8: "Moab is My washpot!"

Now the washpot is the place where garments which have become too soiled for further use are tossed for cleansing. The water is hot, fueled by a roaring fire. Caustic lye soap, shaved into the mixture, thoroughly penetrates every thread of fabric until all impurities are purged. The scrubbed garment is then rinsed, wrung out, and hung out on a line to dry. It is a hard experience for the garment, but the end result is, that it has been purified, and is once again ready for profitable employment. This wonderfully describes Naomi's state when she returns to Bethlehem. She is but a shadow of her former beauty, but enough so that she can be recognized. The Almighty has dealt harshly with her, but wonderfully in mercy. *She* took the initiative and went out. *God* took the initiative in bringing her home by way of the washpot, and consequently, home again. When sinners come to repentance, they have not their own decision, ordered by their free will, to thank. Their repentance is not the fruit of their wisdom: it is the fruit of God's prevenient grace. Down the road of our fall, He has prepared hard things to bring us home. We are never a pretty sight when we come home, but we are *home*. God has brought us by way of His washpot!

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