

**Peace** be with you, listening friends. We greet you in the name of God, the Lord of peace, who wants everyone to understand and submit to the way of righteousness that He has established, and have true peace with Him forever. We are happy to be able to return today to present your program *The Way of Righteousness*.

Today, in the last half of our program, we plan to look at a touching "**love story**" recorded in the Holy Scriptures-so don't go away! In our last program we saw how Joshua the servant of Moses led the Israelites into Canaan. We read how God went before Joshua and the Israelites to expel their enemies and bring them into the abundant land of Canaan, just as He had promised their ancestor Abraham long beforehand. Today we plan to look at the two holy books which follow the book of Joshua. They are the books of **Judges and Ruth**. These two books show us what happened **between** the time of the **prophet Joshua** and the time of **the prophet David**.

Before we get into the book of Judges, we should read the message Joshua entrusted to the Israelites before he died. In the last chapter of the book of Joshua, Joshua met with all the leaders of the Israelites to warn them and encourage them to love and obey the Lord their God who had freed them from Egypt and given them the beautiful land in which they were now living. In His last speech to them, Joshua said to them,

*"If serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then **choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.**" Then the multitude of the Israelites answered Joshua saying, "We too will serve the Lord, because He is our God!"*

Now let's look at what really happened. In Judges, chapter two, the Scripture says:

*The people served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things the Lord had done for Israel. Joshua...the servant of the Lord, died at the age of a hundred and ten.<sup>9</sup> And they buried him...in the hill country of Ephraim. After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel. **Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals. They forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. They provoked the Lord to anger because they forsook him and served Baal.***

Thus, the Israelites forgot the Lord their God, turned their back on Him, and **began to follow the religions of the nations around them**. However, these nations did not know the true God and did not have His Word. They worshiped Baal. Baal was an idol which the people of Canaan claimed was God. They made for themselves images which were representations of Baal and worshiped them. The nations who gave praise to Baal **thought they were worshipping God**. But in reality, they were worshipping their own desires and Satan; however they did not know it because Satan had deceived them. Satan also deceived many Israelites, which was why they turned from the Lord God and began to worship Baal as the nations around them did.

Thus we see how most of the Israelites turned their back on the way which God had established, which was the way of the Law of Moses and the animal sacrifice on the altar to cover sin. Instead of following God's way of righteousness, they followed a false way, that is, the way of the religion of Baal. The first commandment of the Ten Commandments which God spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, says:

*"You shall have no other gods before me...for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of*

*those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand [generations] of those who love me and keep my commandments."*

But most of the Israelites did not honor the Lord God, which is why God punished them.

Continuing in chapter two of the book of Judges, the Scripture says:

*Then **the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals... In his anger against Israel the Lord handed them over to raiders who plundered them. He sold them to their enemies all around, whom they were no longer able to resist. Whenever Israel went out to fight, the hand of the Lord was against them to defeat them, just as he had sworn to them. They were in great distress.***

Thus, the book of Judges recounts how the Israelites hardened their hearts and turned from the Lord, again and again. That is why God handed them over to their enemies time after time, to punish them, so that they would acknowledge their sin and repent and be saved from destruction. Every time the Israelites truly repented, God raised up for them leaders, or judges, to save them from their enemies. We would like to tell you about such heroes as Gideon who defeated a huge, powerful army with just three hundred men, or about Samson who singlehandedly overcame a thousand soldiers, but time does not allow us to do so. Perhaps you will read their fascinating stories for yourselves in the book of Judges.

In summary, the book of Judges shows us that each time the Israelites strayed from God and His Word, the Lord would punish them so that they would turn from their sin and return to Him. When they repented, God would provide for them a leader to rescue them from their enemies. That is the story of **the book of Judges** in brief.

Yes, the Israelites sinned against God again and again. But could their unfaithfulness hinder God's faithfulness? Never! Truly, God punished every individual who sinned, but

He preserved the nation of Israel as a whole, because God could not forget what He had promised Abraham long beforehand when He said to him, "*All nations on earth will be blessed through your offspring.*" God planned to make of Abraham's descendants a nation which would bring to the earth **the Savior of the world**. Nothing could hinder God's wonderful design: not the sin of the Israelites, not Pharaoh, not the people of Egypt, not the people of Canaan, not a false religion like that of Baal, not even Satan himself. **Nothing could hinder God's plan to send down the Savior of the world through the nation of Israel!**

Now, we must look at the short book that follows the book of Judges: **the book of Ruth**. The story of this book is a marvelous story. It is like a lovely flower growing in the midst of a smelly garbage dump, because it tells **the story of a woman who loved God in the midst of a crooked and depraved generation.**

We cannot read to you the whole book of Ruth today, but we can summarize it for you. What you must first know is that **Ruth** was a widow and that she did not belong to the nation of Israel. She belonged to the people of **Moab** and lived in the land of Moab, which was situated south of the land of Israel. Also, you should know that the people of Moab were idolaters and despised both the God of Israel and the Israelites.

Ruth belonged to the nation of Moab, but this did not cause her to despise the God of Israel. No, in fact, **Ruth believed in the God of Israel with all her heart**. Ruth had heard how the Lord God had performed awesome miracles in delivering the multitude of Israel from the hands of the Egyptians. Also, Ruth had heard the reliable words which the prophet Moses had written in the Torah concerning the way of salvation which God had established. Ruth believed in the Lord with all her heart, and accepted the message that He sent down to the Israelites.

So then, what we must observe concerning Ruth is this: she lived in Moab among idolaters. Ruth's parents were idolaters. And Ruth was born into their religion. But now **Ruth no longer believed the religion of her father**. The God of Israel was the One in whom Ruth believed. Thus we see that Ruth had a choice to make and it was not easy! Should Ruth remain in her father's house, continue in her father's religion and marry a man who did not know the God of Israel? Or should she turn her back on her father's house and religion and move to Israel? That is the difficult choice that Ruth had to make!

Before we find out which path Ruth chose, you should also know that Ruth had a sister-in-law named **Orpah**. Like Ruth, Orpah also knew about the God of Israel. Thus, Ruth's sister-in-law also **had to choose** between continuing in the religion of her father or following the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Which path did Ruth and Orpah chose? Orpah chose **the easier path**, that is, to remain in her father's house and marry a man who shared her father's religion. But Ruth chose **the difficult path**, that is, to leave her father's house and move to the land of Israel. Ruth knew that no one can worship two gods. One could not mix worshiping the God of Israel and worshiping the idols of Moab. That is why Ruth turned her back on her father's religion. Ruth decided, **it is better to obey God than to obey man**. Ruth was willing to be misunderstood by her family and friends in order to follow the true and living God. As the old African saying goes, "Whoever wants honey must brave the bees." Thus Ruth left her father's house, and moved to the land of Israel, to a small town called *Bethlehem*.

Now a man lived in Bethlehem whose name was **Boaz**. Boaz was **the son of Rahab**, the woman who escaped from the disaster, which fell on the city of Jericho, as we

heard in our last lesson. Boaz was a righteous man, and greatly treasured the Word of God. Boaz also had riches and many fields of grain, but he did not yet have a wife.

The Scriptures recount how Ruth, who now lived in the city of Bethlehem, had the habit of leaving early in the morning every day to go to the fields to gather the barley, which the harvesters had dropped. Ruth was a poor peasant and according to the law which God gave Moses for the Israelites, the poor were allowed to glean in this way, so that they might not go hungry. Thus the Scriptures tell us how God led Ruth to go and glean in the field of Boaz, the son of Rahab.

Boaz noticed Ruth gleaning in his field and spoke with her. Boaz quickly recognized the beauty of Ruth's character. Boaz was a righteous man and saw that Ruth was a virtuous woman. Can you guess what happened? It isn't too hard to figure out! Yes, Boaz and Ruth **fell in love** with each other and eventually got married. Ruth put God and His Word first in her life and God blessed her for it. Thus, the Scripture says: Boaz and Ruth had a son named **Obed**. Obed became the father of **Jesse**, and Jesse became the father of **David** who became the great king of the nation of Israel, and the prophet who wrote many of the **Psalms**. And from David's offspring **the Redeemer** arose, that is, the Savior of the world, of whom all the prophets prophesied.

Thus we see today how God worked in the life of Ruth, a woman who was not of the nation of Israel. **While the Israelites turned their backs on the Lord their God to follow the religions of the surrounding nations, Ruth turned her back on the religion of her father to follow the God of Israel!** Thus, God led Ruth to live in Bethlehem to marry Boaz, and to become the great-grandmother of David, king of Israel. In all of this, we can see how God was moving forward with His plan to bring **the Redeemer** into the world, because it was from **the descendants of David** and **in the town of Bethlehem** that the Savior of the world was destined to be born.

This is where we must stop. Next time, God willing, we will get into the book that recounts the life of the prophet David who was born in Bethlehem and who descended from Ruth and Boaz. Today we bid you farewell with a question: **Who are you most like?** Are you more like Orpah, Ruth's sister-in-law, who chose **the easy path?** Or are you like courageous Ruth, who turned her back on her father's religion to follow **the One true God?**

Thank you for listening....God bless you as you remember what the prophet Joshua told the Israelites before he died:

*"Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve...As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord!"*

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