

**"Your People Will Be My People:"** Ruth 1:1-17.

The story of Ruth and Naomi is a beautiful picture of the kind of relationship that should exist between the Church and Israel.

Megillat Orpah, is a supplement to the Book of Ruth, a collection of Jewish legends that mentions the following:

Orpah and Ruth were daughters of the Moabite Eglon. Orpah was as stubborn as a camel. Ruth was as self-possessed as a doe. Their father Eglon worshipped and sacrificed to the Moabite god Chemosh.

When a famine broke out in Judah, Elimelech the Ephrathite moved out of Bethlehem to the neighbouring land of Moab with his wife Naomi and his sons Mahlon and Chilion.

When Eglon saw Naomi's wise sons he gave them his daughters Ruth and Orpah to be their wives. However Elimelech and his sons died. Naomi was left alone with her daughters-in-law Ruth and Orpah.

When Naomi found out that the famine in Judah had ended she set out to return to Bethlehem. On the way she urged Ruth and Orpah to return to their homeland and look for new husbands.

Because Naomi had lost both her husband and her sons in a foreign land she said, "Do not call me Naomi, the gracious one, any longer; call me Mara, she who has become bitter."

\*'Mimekor Yisrael: Classical Jewish Folktales,' collected by Micha Joseph Bin-Gorion.

## **Naomi & Ruth**

Naomi, had become bitter, and firmly refused Ruth's offer, but Ruth replied clear and certain: "**Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried.**" (Ruth 1:16-17).

Ruth committed herself first to Naomi and her people and only then to Naomi's God. Ruth's difficult decision to leave her pagan roots in Moab and join herself to Israel ended up being the best decision she ever made. Many Christians embrace Naomi's God, the God of the Bible, but not the Jewish people.

Because Ruth committed herself to Naomi's people she was grafted in to the Jewish genealogy.

Ruth ended up marrying Boaz, a prosperous Jewish farmer. Then Ruth, who had never borne children before, would bear a son, Obed who bore her a grandson, Jesse, and Jesse's son was David. Thus through her great-grandson David, Ruth became an ancestor of the Messiah, who would one day be born in the same town of Bethlehem.

## **Orpah**

Orpah, like Ruth, was also a Gentile who had married a Jew. Unlike her sister Ruth, she decided to stay in her Gentile world in Moab and abandon her Jewish mother-in-law at her greatest time of need.

Orpah missed her chance to be grafted in to God's people Israel, and instead became the ancestor of one of Israel's enemies. She came to fulfil the saying, "He who is not with me is against me."

Tradition states that after making a pretence of accompanying Ruth and her mother-in-law, by walking with them a mere forty paces she returned to Moab. There she met and married a Philistine from the giant race of the Rephaites and so became an ancestor of Goliath (II Samuel 21:16ff) who was involved in terrorism and murder.

When war broke out the Philistines challenged the Israelites to a duel. This meant that Ruth's great-grandson David and Orpah's great-grandson Goliath stood facing each other as cousins.

Goliath challenged the Israelites every morning and every evening, to disturb the Israelites in their prayers at the hour set for reciting the Shema (1 Sam 17:16). Tradition says he was permitted to repeat his defiance's for forty days because of the forty paces which Orpah had accompanied Ruth

## The Church

There are Christians who think that after Golgotha, God no longer restricts His redemptive acts to one single nation nor limits salvation history to the small Land of Israel between the Mediterranean Sea and Jordan River with Jerusalem as its capital.

Yet the fact that God has preserved Israel through a 2,000-year journey among the nations and brought the Jews back to their land shows that He remains faithful to His covenant people.

Jews and Christians serve the same God, the one God. Christians should understand that the State of Israel belongs together with them as a witness to God who is called by God. Ludwig Schneider

Orpah is a picture of much of the Gentile segment of the Church that has not been able to understand and appreciate the inseparable bond between the Church and Israel. Instead of identifying herself with the Jews, the Orpah Church has turned her back on Israel and maintains a religious culture that is virtually cut off from its Hebrew roots.

Orpah began to leave with Naomi but quickly leaves Naomi to fend for herself.

To the Samaritan woman at the well Jesus said **salvation is from the Jews**. John 4:22

Although the church owes its very salvation to the Jews, all too often she has abandoned them in their time of need.

Oppressed on every side by well armed Muslims, many in the world are blaming the Jews for the current international financial crisis

Popular anti-Semitic sentiment frighteningly reminiscent of the lead-up to Nazi rule in Germany is growing in the United States and Europe in response to the current economic crisis.

With small businesses across the country unable to secure needed loans and ordinary people being turned away by mortgage societies and banks, many people are looking for a scapegoat.

And it seems the old lies regarding malicious Jewish control of global finances are far from dead.

There is a huge upsurge in the amount of anti-Semitic postings on the Internet.

From popular blogs to Internet forums to alternative news websites, Jews are being widely blamed for the economic downturn.

The owners and operators of some of the websites said they had tried to remove the offensive postings, but that the numbers were simply too great for them to handle.

At first, the Church, like Orpah, began with the Jews, with Gentile believers worshiping and working alongside Messianic Jews. They kept the Biblical feasts of the Lord and had no intention of ever cutting themselves off from the nourishing sap of the olive tree of Israel (**you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root**, Romans 11:17).

But like Orpah, who abandoned Naomi, most of the Gentile Church has done the same thing.

Within a generation of the crucifixion of Jesus, the Roman army had ransacked the city of Jerusalem and totally destroyed the Temple and, eventually, much of the indigenous Jewish culture of Israel.

Within a few hundred years, the Church, for the most part, came to disregard the significance of the Jewish people.

There arose a number of Christian theologians who saw the involvement of the Jews in cooperation with the Romans in the crucifixion of Jesus and the subsequent destruction of the temple in Jerusalem as a sign that God was finished with Israel. God had rejected Israel once and for all. God would now form a new chosen people. The Church became the new Israel of God.

Anti-Semitism was justified—all done in the name of good theology.

Six centuries later, an even more hideous hatred for the Jews by so-called Christians would be revealed. The Crusaders are often remembered for their chivalry, faith, and zeal. But in reality, many of the Crusaders were cruel men who hated the Jews with a passion. As punishment for the Jews' role in the murder of Christ, the Crusaders took revenge on the Jewish people living in the Holy Land. In the year 1000, when the Crusaders first arrived in the Holy Land, there were 300,000 Jewish residents. But by the time the Crusaders left the scene less than 200 years later, only 1,000 Jewish families still remained.

Anti-Semitism is even evident in the writings of the Protestant Reformers. Martin Luther became just as severe as the Roman Church in his contempt for the Jews. He called for the expulsion of the Jews from Germany and the destruction of their synagogues and books.

It should come as no surprise that when the Nazis came to power in Germany, they used the writings of theologians such as Luther to justify their policies. The result was a Holocaust in which six million Jews were exterminated.

Unfortunately, much of the Church stood idly by, unwilling to lend a hand to the Jewish people.

## Response

Will we be like Orpah and turn our backs on Israel in her time of need? Or will we be like Ruth and cling to Israel, always ready to give her support and encouragement?

To be a Ruth means loving the Jewish people unconditionally.

**Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you.** Ruth 1:16

**"Entreat me not,"** or, **"Be not against me."** Naomi was not very open at first to the idea of Ruth coming with her back to Israel. But Ruth was determined to come anyway. Ruth's love for Naomi would not be stopped by rejection. She would stick by Naomi through thick and thin, even if she wasn't wanted.

Similarly today if Christians offer love to Jews, because they have been bitterly disappointed by Christians in the past they cannot believe that it is genuine.

Paul taught in Romans 11:11, **"...salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious."** The reality is the Jews don't envy our religion. Maybe there is a shortage of Hesed love for them

**"Ruth clung to her (Naomi)."** Verse 14:

There are prophecies about Gentiles clinging to the Jews in the last days. (Isaiah 14:1-2.)

**Many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the LORD Almighty and to entreat him. This is what the LORD Almighty says: In those days ten men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, 'Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.'** Zech 8:22-23

Ruth said **Your people will be my people and your God my God.**(16)

When we take Israel's God for our God, we must take His people for our people; even if they at first would rather we not cling too closely. To abandon God's chosen people Israel is to abandon a people that He loves with an everlasting love.

Some define a true friend as the first person who comes in when the whole world has gone out.

Three times Naomi insisted that Ruth return to Moab (verses 11, 12, 15). Ruth was serious about her love for Naomi.

Her love was like God's love for Israel— Hesed love.  
As Christians, our love for the Jewish people must be Hesed love.  
True love is God's kind of love— Hesed love.

Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, Ruth 1:16.

How many of us would have risked going with the Jews into the gas chambers by hiding Jews 70 years ago, as the ten Boom family did?

## The Blessing

Any sacrifice we make on behalf of Israel is far outweighed by the blessing given in return. Ruth sacrificed much, but she was rewarded richly for her humble service to Naomi. A husband, a son and a place in the lineage of King David and our messiah Jesus.

Like Ruth, we as the Church may have a central role to play in the salvation and deliverance of Naomi (the Jewish people). But it will require more than nice words and preaching the gospel. It means being willing to love the Jews unconditionally.

I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. Genesis 12:3

## Conclusion

1. Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem
2. Seek to understand the Jewish roots of your faith
3. Express solidarity with Israel and the Jewish people

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