

# A Lonely Return

Long Beach Alliance Church • November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2010 • Pastor Chris Lankford

**But Ruth said, “Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me.”**

**~Ruth 1:16-17 (NASB)**

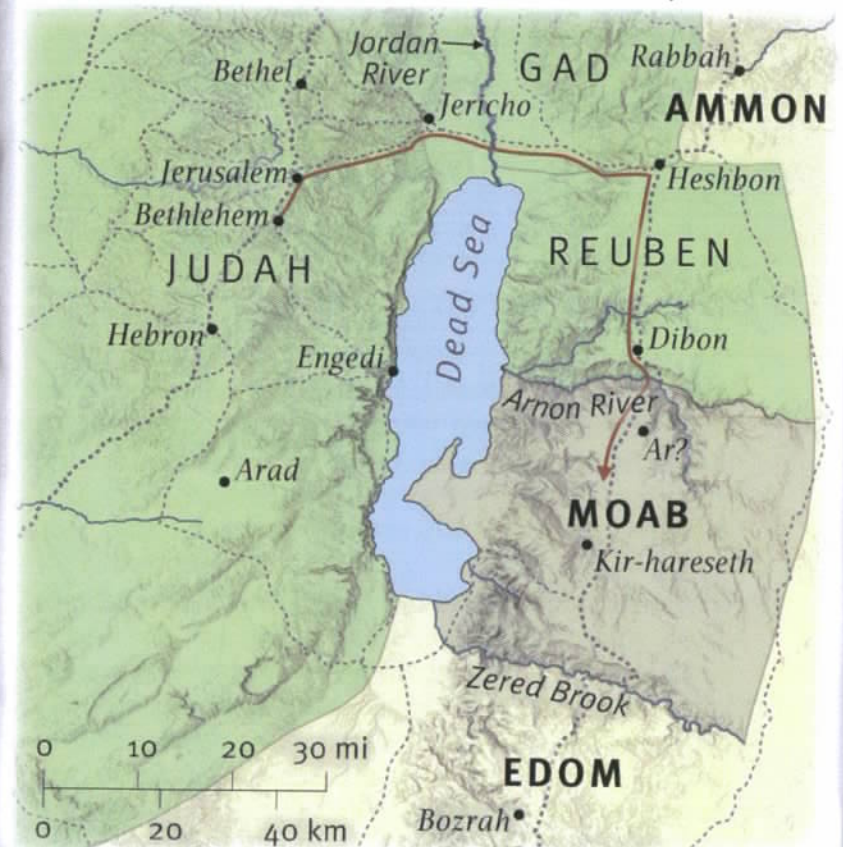
## 1) A Time Of Selfish Hearts And Selfish Solutions

- A) The story of Ruth occurred during the “days when the judges governed” (Ruth 1:1), a time period between the death of Joshua (about 1360 B.C.) and the beginning of the Monarchy (about 1050 B.C.). Ruth probably lived around the time of Gideon and Samson (two famous Judges).
- B) The time of the judges was marked by rebellion, violence, death, and anarchy (note Judges 17:6, 21:25). The time of Israel’s judges progressed in increasingly downward cycles which led Israel further and further away from their covenant with God. It was into the midst of this environment, one that begged for strong leadership, that the story of Ruth was written.

- C) God’s chosen people felt their spiritual problems needed political answers, but the book of Ruth reveals our deepest needs and God’s great pleasure in providing for His people.

## 2) From Bethlehem To Moab

- A) Because of a famine in the land of Israel, Elimelech (God is king) of Bethlehem (ironically, “city of bread”), from the “clan” of Ephrath (but the tribe of Judah), relocates his family from Israel to the foreign country of Moab with his wife, Naomi, and their two sons, Mahlon & Chilion (1:1-2).
- B) Moab (pictured below) bordered the land of Israel, and, because of its geographic location, is protected from severe famine (unlike the Jerusalem/Bethlehem area).



- C) The text does not say where Elimelech's family settled, but modern archaeological excavations of the area show more dense settlements in the Northern regions of Moab.
- D) The text emphasizes that Elimelech and his family were "aliens" in the land of Moab (1:1), where the pressure to assimilate into the local customs, religion\*, and community would have been very intense.
- E) Sadly, Elimelech dies in Moab, leaving Naomi a widow with her two sons, who both marry Moabite women† named Orpah and Ruth (1:3-4). The family of Elimelech lives in Moab for the next ten years in satisfying stability.
- F) But, just as it seems Naomi's story has stabilized (1:4), both Mahlon & Chilion die, leaving Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth as widows in Moab (1:5).

\* Place names such as Beth-baal-peor, Beth-baal-meon, and Bemoth-baal indicate the existence of local Baal shrines, common amongst the Canaanite peoples. The place name Horonaim (an Egyptian name) is suggestive of Egyptian influences. During the time of Elimelech, Chemosh emerged as the national god of the Moabites. Chemosh was understood to have the same special relationship with the Moabites that Yahweh had with the Israelites. Jeremiah refers to the Moabites as "the people of Chemosh" (48:46; see also Num 21:29). Chemosh appears as an element in royal names (Kammusunadbi, Kamashaltu); and a royal compound in the capital city of Dibon (established during a time when Dibon was under Moabite control) which featured a large sanctuary erected in honor to Chemosh. One of the horrible aspects of Chemosh worship was the sacrifice of children, burned to death in fire, to appeal to Chemosh for military success (collected from various sources, esp. Anchor Bible Dictionary, "Moab" by J. Maxwell Miller, pgs. 882-893).

† Were these marriages a reason for celebration or are they a mark of faithlessness in Elimelech's family? Is it notable that both men do not marry until their father is dead? Does this imply their father's disapproval? Simply, the text gives us no clue. It is notable that Deuteronomy 23:3 prohibits Moabites and Ammonites (only) from entering the "assembly of the Lord." Deuteronomy 7:3 forbids intermarriage with people which were to be dispossessed from the land of Israel (i.e., Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, Jebusites), but not other foreigners. Though Ezra & Nehemiah (in later times) totally forbade such marriages (Ezra 9:1-10:44; Nehemiah 13:23-27) – indeed, they sought to expel all foreigners (Nehemiah 13:1-3) – Esther shows that their prohibition was apparently not considered valid in a foreign land. We should not be too quick to judge the sons of Elimelech, but rather view the text simply as descriptive, neither condoning or condemning (collected from various sources, esp. *The Book of Ruth*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (NICOT), by Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., ©1988, pg. 93).

### 3) Naomi's Emptiness

- A) In the face of such tragedy, Naomi and her fellow daughter-in-law widows hurriedly depart from Moab (perhaps an indication of their poverty), to return to Southern Kingdom of Judah in Israel, where God has provided "bread" once again (1:6-7).
- B) On the way back to Bethlehem, Naomi asks Orpah and Ruth to go back to the families of their deceased husbands in Moab (1:8). The scene is both emotional and intense (1:9), as it appears Naomi will return to Israel completely empty of both a husband and any family.
- C) Both women refuse to return to Moab (1:10), causing Naomi to press the issue with Orpah and Ruth, freeing them from any responsibility to her (1:11-13a).
- D) Naomi reasons that the road she needs to walk should only be walked by her, noting that God's hand is against her (1:13), causing the women to burst into loud crying again (1:14). But in light of Naomi's appeal, Orpah kisses Naomi goodbye, and returns home to Moab while Ruth clings desperately to Naomi, not letting her go (1:14).

### 4) Ruth the Moabitess

- A) As Naomi begins to reason with Ruth (1:15), Ruth's first words come out with the extraordinary strength of command and power of poetry (1:16-17). Ruth's words are faithful and adamant – she is remaining – no matter what!
- B) Naomi relents and both women arrive in Bethlehem (1:18-19), where we feel the depth of pain and humiliation which "bitter" Naomi feels toward the Almighty (the One with all the power, 1:20-21). In a bit of foreshadowing, the Barley harvest (1:22) is soon to come (late April/early May)...

