

## GOD KNOWS NO FOREIGNERS

We sometimes think that God's love extends only to those who are directly involved in His purpose. Not so! Consider this illustration: A man had two sons. He needed a can of paint from the hardware store and asked one son to go get the paint. He even let this son use his car to go to the store. Does this mean he loves the other son any less? Absolutely not! Who does the father hold responsible for the successful completion of the assigned job? The answer is obvious. It has to be the son he sent to the store and enabled him to go using the family car.

God's chosen people during the time following the patriarchs until the end of the seventy weeks of Daniel (ended in AD 34) was the nation of Israel. Up until that time, God had worked through individuals. After the Nation of Israel fail in their stewardship of God's salvation plan, responsibility was passed to the church which included not only Jews but also Gentiles. The new covenant was with all who had the faith of Abraham.

The people of Israel thought they had a corner on God's love since he had chosen them to help fulfill His purpose. They, in their arrogance, considered all others to be inferior foreigners. However, God knows no foreigners since He is the Creator of all men. In several instances which were captured in the literature of the nation of Israel, God was seen as being inclusive of those outside of Israel in the development of that nation and some of its key role models. We see such inclusion as the historical accounts of the Old Testament switch from the time of the Judges to the time of the united kingdom.

During the time of the Judges, we are told that all men did what was right in their own sight. In contrast to this, a character is introduced who does not show such disregard for responsibility and for what is right. This noble character is a woman named Ruth.

**RUTH 1:1-2** Famine was only one of many problems the nation of Israel encountered. Because of such economic hardship, people would leave their homeland and look for means to support their families. It still happens even today. Whether Elimelech intended to stay in Moab or return to Israel is not known.

**RUTH 1:3-5** Elimelech's wife Naomi had a really serious problem. The death of her husband was serious enough since women had few rights. Naomi was a foreigner and this just further complicated the problems. The sons intermarried with the Moabite women and then both of them died. Things were not too bad when Naomi had sons to provide for her, but things had become quite serious when she not only had no resources but also the extra responsibility of two daughters-in-law. Normally, the young widows would become the wives of the brothers of their deceased husbands, but Naomi had no more sons.

In the meantime, conditions improved in Israel. Naomi decided to return to her homeland. The three of them left and started toward the land of Judah. Naomi realized that she was not being fair to these young women in that the chance of them finding a husband in Israel was going to be very small. She advised each of them to return to their mother's home.

One daughter-in-law followed Naomi's advice and tearfully left. However, Ruth chose to stay with Naomi. It was in this choice that she spoke some of the most beautiful words of devotion ever recorded. The King James Version captures it this way:

And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, [or] to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people [shall be] my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, [if ought] but death part thee and me. [Ruth 1:16,17]

We notice that not only did Ruth choose Naomi, but she also choose Naomi's God to be her God.

**RUTH 2:1-3** They returned to Bethlehem in the land of Judah and went about trying to survive in a society that had made some provision for widows and the disadvantaged. The provision of "gleaning" was to allow those who did not have the means of growing their own food to find enough to get by. Ruth went to follow the harvesters in the fields so she and her mother-in-law could survive. In God's provision she picked a field belonging to a relative of Naomi, a man named Boaz.

As the story unfolded, Boaz noticed the young woman gleaning in the field and discovered

that she was a relative by marriage. He was apparently attracted to her. He had heard of her kindness to Naomi and invited her to return to his field each day during the harvest. He even made some arrangements to have the harvesters leave some extra for her to glean.

Naomi was delighted when she learned of the meeting and recognized that since Boaz was a relative he might see some additional responsibility toward Ruth. Indeed, Naomi coached Ruth in the way she should approach Boaz to indicate her interest in him. As you know the story, the outcome was perfect. Boaz wanted to marry Ruth and the arrangements were made with another relative who might have chosen to marry Ruth instead. This older man was fearful that such a marriage would endanger his estate and declined. The way was opened for Boaz and Ruth to marry.

**RUTH 4:13-17** Usually it is impossible to "second guess" what God is doing. Earlier in her life, Naomi was bitter toward God for the loss of her husband and her sons. She was bitter because of her lot in life. Yet we can see that God was at work in all of what had happened. He provided comfort and help for her during her loss and at the same time worked out a message for the rest of us regarding his acceptance of all people.

God was at work in this union of Ruth and Boaz. He bless their marriage with a son who was the grandfather of king David. God included a non-Jew in the lineage of the Messiah. The "non-chosen" people are acceptable to God and were always included in His plan and purpose. When Jesus told Nicodemus what God was doing, He indicated that God so love the world -- all the people -- that whosoever believed on Him might not perish but have everlasting life. We must always be careful to not exclude anyone by our petty prejudices. We may find ourselves at odds with God.