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BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:

A1854 ~ Ruth the Gleaner.

Welcome to Bible Adventures. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow. Jesus is Lord of all.

In Old Testament times, when judges were ruling Israel between 1,350 BC and 1,050 BC, there was a serious famine in the land of Israel. An Israelite man named Elimelech and his wife Naomi lived with their two sons in Bethlehem, in Judah. They were having difficulty growing enough food to keep themselves alive. So Elimelech decided to move to another country called Moab, which was about 45 kilometres away where they heard that food was plentiful.

Was it right for the family to leave their promised land and go away? The Moab nation was on the east side of the Dead Sea and had been established by Moab, a son of Abraham's nephew Lot. This made the Moabites distant cousins to the Israelites. When Moses was leading Israel to the Promised Land in Canaan, God had told them not to attack or to provoke Moab.

Later, however, when the Israelites had forsaken the Lord and worshipped the idols of the Canaanites, God raised up the Moabites to punish them. In the Bible book of Judges, Chapter 3, the king of Moab gathered other people to help him fight against Israel and as a result, defeated them. The Israelites then served the king of Moab for 18 years. Then the king of Moab was assassinated by an Israelite, who soon called together an army to battle against the Moabites, defeating them and giving Israel 80 years of peace.

In Elimelech's time, there was an uneasy peace between Israel and Moab, so he and his family travelled there, planning to stay until the famine in Israel was over. After settling in Moab, Elimelech died and his two sons married Moabite women. Israelites were permitted to marry Moabite women because the Moabites weren't considered the same as the Canaanites, with whom marriage was forbidden. Nevertheless, the Moabites were pagans who worshipped many gods and goddesses.

After 10 years in Moab, Naomi's two sons also died, leaving no children. Naomi recognised that it was the Lord who had caused her misfortune and may have assumed that God was also displeased with her. When troubles and tragedy come to us in life, we too may assume that God is displeased with something that we've done. However, like Naomi, we don't always know what God's plans are for our future.

In grief and with no descendants to her name, Naomi decided to return to Israel, as she'd heard that there was food available again in Judah. Her two daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, decided to leave Moab and journey with her. On the way, however, Naomi discouraged them from going with her, as she thought they'd be better off going back to their own families and in time, finding new husbands. She knew it would be a lot harder for them to find husbands in Judah.

Naomi released Ruth and Orpah from any obligation that they might have been feeling towards their now elderly mother-in-law. She blessed them. Eventually after many tears, Orpah said her goodbyes and went back to Moab. Orpah didn't want to leave Naomi, but she didn't love her well enough to leave Moab only for her sake. Many people have regard for the Lord Jesus Christ, yet never come to salvation through Him, because they won't forsake the other things to become fully devoted to Him. They love Him, yet then leave Him, because they don't love Him enough just for Himself. They love other things better.

However, Ruth refused to leave Naomi and said that she would go wherever Naomi went and would stay wherever Naomi stayed. In choosing this course of action, Ruth was continuing to show kindness and love to Naomi, even though it would mean personal sacrifices for her own future.

We can ask: "Did Naomi do the right thing to discourage her daughters-in-law from going with her?" If she hadn't, she might have saved both of them from the idolatry of Moab and brought them to faith and worship of the God of Israel. However, Naomi didn't want the women coming with her and later regretting it. Ruth made a deliberate choice to stay with Naomi and had counted the cost. She was determined to help Naomi all she could, knowing that Naomi had no one else to look after her in her aging years.

What is a gleaner? Back in the days before mechanical harvesters cut the heads of grain off their stalks and separated the grain from the dead leaves, these tasks had to be done by hand. At harvest time, the reapers cut off the long stalks and they bound them into bundles, before they were taken away to be threshed so that only the good grain was left to be used. Poor people followed the reapers through the fields, picking up any stalks of grain that had dropped to the ground. This method of helping to feed poor people was instructed by the Lord Himself. In Leviticus, Chapter 23, it says: “When you harvest the grain in your land, don't harvest the grain in the corners of your fields or gather what is left after you're finished. Leave it for poor people and foreigners. I am the LORD your God.”

It was back-breaking work gleaning in the hot sun all day, but Ruth was prepared to do this for food for herself and Naomi. When they arrived back in Bethlehem from Moab, it was the start of the barley harvest and the wheat harvest was to follow that. Ruth got permission to glean from the man in charge of the reapers. She started gleaning in part of a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the family of Naomi's late husband. Boaz was a wealthy man, yet he came out from Bethlehem to personally check the progress of the harvest.

Boaz noticed Ruth and asked his foreman about her. He already knew her background, her relationship to Naomi and her kind treatment towards Naomi. In turn, Boaz treated Ruth like a relative with special privileges. Ruth in response, showed humility and found comfort that he had spoken kindly to her. Boaz told Ruth to stay with his own workers. After she'd gone back to work, Boaz told his workers to leave extra grain for her to collect.

At the end of the first day, Ruth beat out the barley from what she had gleaned and it came to nearly 11 kilograms! She took this home to Naomi, who was surprised at how much Ruth had managed to get. That amount would last them both for several weeks and was much more than the amount normally gleaned in a day.

Ruth was someone who was a hard worker. Children have to be taught a good work ethic in their homes from a young age, without expecting to be paid for everything they do. Very often in our times, young people want to get given things that they haven't earned. There's a sense that people are entitled to be clothed, housed and fed even, if they make no effort or contribution towards their own welfare. It's called: 'Being carried up the ladder of success.' But those older people who have worked hard for what they've got, don't appreciate this self-serving attitude!

The theme of the book of Ruth is kindness for one another. Naomi was kind to Ruth and Orpah. They were kind to her. Because Ruth was kind to Naomi, Boaz was kind to her. Kindness is love in action. Constant kindness can accomplish much, as it results in misunderstanding, mistrust and hostility to disappear. Kindness is part of God's program for making our world a better place.

Sometimes, kindness is the little things that count. Striving to show more of these tender mercies to others little-by-little will add up completely to a changed overall attitude – one formed by kindness. An older preacher received an invitation from a young pastor to speak at his church. The young pastor told his visitor that he remembered when the older man had preached at his father's church many years before. He said, "My mother had worked all night, and after dinner you did the dishes. I'll never forget that. I forgot your sermon but I haven't forgotten you doing dishes in my mother's home."

Don't squander opportunities for kindness. If you are filled with God's Spirit and ready for opportunities to come, then you can make the most of them. If you miss an opportunity, then plan to show kindness the next time that situation arises. Make room for kindness daily by changing your routine where necessary, take more time for other people and develop an attitude of giving. It won't happen overnight, but the more you think about giving more kindness, the more your daily life will be affected by that thinking.

Although human kindness that is shown to one another is important, it is the lovingkindness of God, our Heavenly Father that is far superior. In Psalm 117, it says: "For His lovingkindness is great toward us. And the truth of the LORD is everlasting. Praise the LORD!" And in Romans, Chapter 2, "Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can't you see that His kindness is intended to turn you from your sin?" The various fruit of the Spirit blend well with one another: kindness involves love, longsuffering, self-control and for good reason: God is complete and balanced. Kindness, when practiced, is an area that keeps our spiritual attitudes and lives in balance.

Kindness is not a selfish attempt to get something for ourselves. It's a show of mercy and love to other human beings with no thought of reward. As well as doing kind deeds, there are both kind ways of listening and speaking too. We may all develop the same type of love and kindness God has for us.

In Titus, Chapter 3, verses 4-7, it says: “But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour was revealed, he saved us. It was not because of any good deeds that we ourselves had done, but because of his own mercy that he saved us, through the Holy Spirit, who gives us new birth and new life by washing us. God poured out the Holy Spirit abundantly on us through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that by his grace we might be put right with God and come into possession of the eternal life we hope for. This is a true saying.”

The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.

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