

Some Women of the Bible, Part I

by
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It All Began With Eve

Can you see that the fullness of man's life involves woman?

And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him (Genesis 2:18).

We are all acquainted with this familiar passage of Scripture. This series of studies will deal with women in the Bible. The theme for this whole series is "Their souls did magnify the Lord." We understand this to mean that the recorded experiences of these women will reveal the operation of God's will in human beings. This study "It All Began With Eve," suggests that we should look for profound basic insights in the record about Eve.

Actually the story of Eve found in the first three chapters of Genesis is not long; and it is not complicated, but it is very revealing. You and I would do well to keep in mind the fact of sin. This means that no man or woman today could ever be as Adam and Eve were. When Adam and Eve came together they were sinless. They had not been contaminated by sin.

As human beings, we are affected by our sinful natures, and we are inclined to bend our thinking in our own direction. That is why I say, let us go by the Scriptures. We approach this study in order to learn. We are going to learn from the Scriptures, because we believe the Scriptures were recorded for our learning.

In this study of Eve we will find some very important things. First of all we will find something true about human nature.

It is not good that the man should be alone (Genesis 2:18).

Woman was created not simply to give man satisfaction, not simply to give him pleasure, but for all aspects of his being. It is simply not good that man should be alone. Social relationships, the things that go on between people, provide the highest and greatest values a human being can have.

The second thing that I want to point out is that there is something here about woman's nature. The Lord God took one of Adam's ribs and created the woman. The Hebrew words used there did not specify the word "rib." The Hebrew word is "side." God opened his side, and took out of his side. When the Lord God took part of the man to make the woman, He took that part from the man's side. Not from his head, which might give you the idea that she was to rule him; and not from his feet, which would give you somehow the idea that it would be all right for him to walk on her; but from his side that she should be able to comfort him. I think this is worth noting, and I mention it in passing.

God took from the side of man and made the woman, "a help meet for him." This is the way in which it is stated in the King James Version. Here is something very important. The word "help" if it were

given a direct and good translation of the Hebrew word, would say "helper." It is a noun, a "helper," and "meet for him." That word "meet" means "equal to." Thus is revealed the function of the woman. She is to be a "helper" to the man. It seems obvious without any big argument that the woman's function in the world is to help. Man's function in the world, as it was revealed in the Genesis account, was to have dominion over the things of nature. He was to accomplish things, to do things. The woman was to help. She was to be equal to him. Man would be the leader, she would be the helper, equal to him.

The story in the Bible is rather humbly and simply put. God called all the animals there were before man, and had man name them. This would mean that he evaluated them, and named them. There was not found one suitable to him. This implies that man's association is to be with his equal. When any woman fails to help, she fails. When any man degrades woman, he loses. She is to help him and for this she is to be equal to him.

In the third place there is revealed here something about social nature.

Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh (Genesis 2:24).

This sounds very simple, yet when you realize that in leaving father and mother a man is to surrender his own personal individuality, it means he will never be the same again. This basic truth is still valid. Any time a young couple gets married, one thing is sure: the young man will never be the same again. If he acts on his own after he is married, he is doing wrong. When he got married he settled it that he was no longer his own. He surrendered his individuality, that he might gain mutuality. "They shall be one flesh." This is true unity. In other words, at this point you could say that in the matter of me getting married, I surrender what is mine that I may gain what is ours; and that is better. That is more.

In this portion of Scripture there is also revealed the nature of sin, in connection with Eve's experience. Sin began with deception, that led into questioning God's Word. When Satan said "Hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" he opened the door for trouble. The moment a person starts questioning the Word of God all kinds of trouble follow. The next step Eve was led into was judging God's Word. Satan said to her "Think for yourself. God knows it will not be like that." But it would be. That very suggestion, "think for yourself," can be very misleading. It would be wise to think the thoughts of God. I often think when I see parents calling upon children to make decisions, especially little children, that it is just not fair. Little children cannot do that. They do not know enough. Older people need not be arbitrary and harsh, but they should guide the little ones. That would be proper.

In the case of Eve there was deception. Satan succeeded in getting her to judge God's Word, then act on her own judgment. We read she looked, and she saw, and she wanted. When the woman saw the fruit, and saw it was good for food and a thing to be desired to make one wise, she took and did eat. The actual act was the sin. Satan had used the unscrupulous salesman's approach. He had pointed out what would be attractive to her, but did not point out the truth of the cost that would be involved. Thus she was deceived. The consequences were unavoidable. The curse upon the earth brought thorns and thistles. There would always be trouble: even your garden cannot be without weeds; your farm cannot be without thistles. As you travel there are always things that are contrary. Then there was the judgment upon man: hard labor. He was to work for his bread in the sweat of his countenance. Man would find it hard to do the things that needed to be done. And upon the woman would come sorrow and pain. These conditions have never changed. It has always been that way since the time of Eve. Man may seek in every way possible to alleviate these conditions but the principles are there all the time. These are the consequences of sin.

But in this scriptural record of Eve there is the gleam of a bright star of hope. The curse will make life hard and painful for both men and women, but the record includes a shining ray of hope, "The Seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent." And we rejoice to know this was begun on Calvary's Cross and will be consummated when Christ Jesus returns in glory to set up His Kingdom.

The God of Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, Rachel

Do you realize that the hand of God is involved in all the affairs of His people?

And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her (Genesis 17:16).

These words refer to Sarah. Our attention in this study is focused upon four women, Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel. These are the wives of the Patriarchs. You know how that God has long been known as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This is a matter of studying the God of their wives, Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel.

The Scriptures reveal that God made a promise to Abraham and then continued that promise on to Isaac and then to Jacob. But it may be noted that in the Scriptures that refer to these four women, no mention is made of that promise. That was not the matter in focus. The study of their scriptural record shows that in dealing with the wives, God enabled them to help. Sarah was to bear a son who is to be the heir of the promises. Rebecca was called to be the wife of Isaac and the mother of his children. Leah was to be the first wife of Jacob and the mother of some of his children, and Rachel was to be the beloved second wife of Jacob and mother of some of his children. In each case the woman achieved her potential in her life, in the life of her man. In reviewing the scriptural record of God's dealing with these wives, there are several important truths to be seen. First, God is directly involved with each person. The record of Sarah includes the fact that God had her in mind, and He had something to say about her and to her. The second thing that we can see in the study of these four women is that God has His own will in what He does. There is no evidence that He dealt with Sarah because of any particular aspect of Sarah herself. It was not because of what she looked like. It was not because of what she was capable of doing. The point was that she was the wife of Abraham; and God in His will was going to see to it that she would become the mother of Abraham's heir.

God has His own will in what He does. When He dealt with Rebecca, Rebecca did not particularly, as it were, attract Isaac. As a matter of fact Isaac had not seen her and Rebecca was not especially interested in seeking Isaac. She did not know about him. Rebecca was called. The servant of Abraham went to her home and seeing her and being attracted to her went to the parents and arranged for Rebecca to come and be the bride of Isaac whom she had never seen. That was God's idea. God has His own will in doing what He does with people. And by the way when you and I think about that, we might just pause and say, me too.

A third aspect is that God is Almighty. There is nothing impossible with God. When God said that Sarah would bear a son, He said it and it happened. Now naturally speaking everything was against it, but that did not hinder God. God can do beyond the natural process any time He wants to do so.

This brings us to our fourth observation, that God is not hindered by natural conditions that threaten to prevent His will. He can change conditions. Sometimes we might hear it said: "I don't think there would be time enough for God to work this thing out." God makes time. If He needs more time He can make it. "One day with the Lord is as a thousand years and a thousand years is as one day." We can always remember when we are thinking of the promises of God and it seems: "Everything is against it," that will not stop Him. God is not hindered by natural conditions that threaten to prevent His will.

The fifth observation I want to make is that God works His will by overruling natural processes. We have no reference at all to indicate that Sarah was chosen to be the wife of Abraham for any particular reason. Whatever reason there may have been is obscured – that was not the point. The point was that God chose her to be the mother of Isaac, and He worked His will by manipulating the natural process. She was the wife of Abraham: that is how she came to have Isaac as her son; and God overruled the natural process wherever that was necessary. Consider the matter of Abraham's servant in finding Rebecca. There are

many aspects of that story that are just normal and natural; but when you see it all you can see that God is working everything out. He is overruling and working things altogether. When we think about Leah being brought in to be the wife of Jacob, we can see it was not planned: Jacob had not even intended it. And very probably so far as Leah was concerned she would not even have known about it. It was done for her and done to her. And by the way while we may look at that whole event and feel rather sorry for Leah because she was second in Jacob's affections, the record is it was Leah that was buried in the tomb with Jacob, not Rachel.

In the sixth place I would point out that God works His will silently. He does not advertise it. He does not tell it. If you have not heard God saying anything about what He wants you to do today, that does not mean He does not want you to do something. You will find it right there before you. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." And you can do it as unto the Lord; because God works out His will silently. There is not any big fanfare, no blare of trumpets when you are walking in the will of God. It is right there before you, as it was right there before Rebecca and right there before Sarah. God uses human beings as they are, where they are.

When you read the story of these four women, you will find some places where you may think "That wasn't nice." When you see the way Sarah dealt with Hagar, that was not nice. And the way Rachel stole her father's idols, that was not nice. But you will find out when you go on with this that God does not raise a question. Does that mean He does not see such things? We can be sure He sees everything but He remembers our frame and He knows that we are but dust; and "like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." He uses human beings as they are. I love to emphasize this because that will mean He can use you; that means He may turn to you. And He will turn to me. Doing the thing that is before us – that is what Sarah was to do, that is what Rebecca was to do, that is what Leah was to do, and that is what Rachel was to do. These women were to do the things that were right there before them. And God was working out His will. God uses human beings as they are.

In the course of all of this, we come to see this great thing too, that God deals with individuals in the course of bringing His will to pass. God was doing a great thing through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He was actually setting the situation up to bring the Gospel into the world that we know. He actually had made a promise to Abraham that all the world would be blessed through Abraham. All nations would be blessed through him. And you and I now are privileged to look at this and see that without Sarah it would not have happened, that is true. And without Rebecca it would not have happened, that is true. When you think of all those children of Israel: if it had not been for Leah and Rachel and their two handmaidens, who completed the family of Jacob, there would not have been those sons of Israel. God deals with individuals. You and I can have our part. God deals with individuals in the course of bringing His will to pass.

The will of God may be a great deal greater than either you or I. It may be far more than we know anything about, but He will accomplish it and do it that way. So far as I am concerned, even in my own ministry, in my own service, when I am thinking in terms of The Bible For You in which we are now seeking to serve through this radio ministry and this ministry of literature that we are spreading abroad as far as we possibly can, when we are working in this we have no idea how far the influence will reach. God deals with individuals and uses individuals in the course of bringing His will to pass and that is the way He did with Sarah, and that is the way He did with Rebecca, and that is the way He did with Leah, and that is the way He did with Rachel. And that is the way He is going to do with you by the grace of God.

A Question of Loyalties – Rahab

Do you realize that anybody can have the blessing of God by simply acting in faith?

This study is focused upon a demonstration as to how a sinner can be saved. We are to look upon the Scriptures that deal with the woman, Rahab. This is often passed by. It may very well be because of the kind of woman she was. The Scriptures do not hide this. Both in the Old Testament and the New Testament it is plainly stated that she was Rahab the harlot. We do not generally speak about people like that. But when you come to think about it, here she is a person who was referred to in the New Testament.

Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way (James 2:25)?

Anyone, whosoever will, can be saved by acting in faith according to the promise of God. When you know what God will do, and you have in mind what God can do and what He will do, and then you act believing in that, God will bless. In this whole account there is no mention of the woman's sins. Rahab was called a harlot, and I am quite sure that she was called that because she lived an immoral life; but throughout the whole course of scriptural references, not one time is she ever called to account or judged because of her sin.

Rahab's story should be noted in detail. It is not a difficult story. You will find it in the second chapter of the book of Joshua. It seems that the children of Israel had come to the edge of the country of Canaan, the land into which they were to enter. Joshua, who was now in charge, sent two scouts ahead to the city of Jericho to become acquainted with the situation. We read that they went into the house of Rahab the harlot. She had probably kept something like a hotel or a motel, and these two men went in to stay there. When the authorities had heard that these two investigators, these two spies, had come from Israel, they came to the house of Rahab, and asked that these two men be turned over to the police. But Rahab hid the men and sent the police out in another direction. In this way she spared them. Then she called the men in and said to them, "I have shown you a kindness. Now I know that God is going to give you this country. When you folks come in here and take over this country, as I know you will, I want you to spare me and my house, my people. I want you to do that." The men said, "You have taken care of us. You have protected us. We will protect you, and we give you our word that not one of your household will be hurt. But this is what you are to do. You are to collect all your people into your home; and then hang out from your window a scarlet rope, a scarlet thread. When we come in to capture the city, and we see that scarlet rope outside, you will be spared." That was the arrangement and that is the way it was done.

There are many things we can learn from this remarkable story. The record is remarkable for this reason, she was not a good woman, but she received the blessing. That does not mean that God does not care about sin, but it means that God forgives sin. He has a way of taking care of it. And the story here should be noted in detail. Living in faith, as Joshua was doing, uses practical means. If Joshua had been as some people would think a man would be who is walking in faith and believing in God, why did he need to send the spies? Would he not simply know that God would give him the city anyway? But that is not the way it works.

God makes the beans grow in my garden. But you know, I plant them. Joshua was a man of faith, doing God's will; and he did a practical thing. He sent spies. He did not know everything about Jericho; he did not expect God to reveal everything to him in a vision. He sent spies, scouts, to find out about it. In other words, believing in God, walking in faith, does not ignore the importance of being competent and diligent. A believer will still do as practically as he can.

There is another truth demonstrated here. Walking by faith may involve God's servants working with ungodly persons. Rahab was a harlot. These men from Joshua worked with this woman who was a harlot. Apparently they overlooked her personal record. Apparently this was not involved. I do not need to

raise the question. God did not. The Scriptures do not.

There is a third thing to be noted. Ungodly persons, people who have lived sinful lives, can act in faith in God. Let me put it very simply. The harlot helped.

The fourth fact to note is that a sinner can know about God. In other words a person can get to know about God before he is a saint. A sinner can learn the Gospel. A person can understand salvation even before he believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, and he can understand that salvation is available through God, by God and in God. Rahab knew it.

The fifth thing to be seen is that a sinner can act in obedience to God in the practical situation the sinner is in. Rahab shared in the doom which threatened her city. The whole city of Jericho was about to be captured and destroyed, and Rahab was in there. She was threatened, but she got a message. The Lord gave it to her. She believed the truth: God could save and God could spare.

In the sixth place, obedient servants of God can be helped by believing sinners. I want to emphasize this truth: these men, these spies from Joshua, were actually helped in the accomplishment of their purpose by this harlot, Rahab. But there is more true about her than that she was a harlot. She was a believer. She was a believer who put her trust in God.

We see in the seventh place that a sinner can secure benefits, blessings, by acting in obedience to what the sinner knows about God. God will help, God can save, God does save; and so this woman turned and asked for help. Then again a sinner can be saved because of a promise. Now the promise is not spelled out in so many words, but you can feel it. You can feel the reality that Almighty God who holds the whole world in His hands is a God who will forgive sin. And somehow this woman felt in her bones that it was worthwhile coming in and making a deal, asking for it. Actually, she had done something. She had protected these men. She had put herself, as it were, on the spot. She had actually taken responsibility to cover them, to hide them, and then she turned to God to receive the blessing. Rahab and her house were spared according to this promise of God's grace that she could feel.

We may notice in the eighth place that salvation of the sinner was secured, made sure, by that scarlet thread. Rahab did nothing but believe, but she obeyed. What I mean to say is that she did not do anything about protecting herself. She did something about the servants of God. She served them, she did something for them, and she asked for protection. When she obeyed the instructions, "hang out that scarlet thread," she was displaying the reminder of the promise and she was spared.

It is a wonderful thing to remember the words of Almighty God as revealed in Scripture: "I have cast all thy sins behind my back." Let every one of us who are following through on this meditation have in mind that so far as you and I are concerned, we can turn our hearts and our minds over to God, and by acting in line with His promise, committing ourselves to Him, we can expect the blessing of God according to His grace and mercy.

A Woman Who Ruled In Israel – Deborah

Do you realize that sometimes the function of leadership is carried out by a woman?

And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time (Judges 4:4).

Our study here will be focused upon the classic instance of a woman leader in Israel. If anybody were ever to seek whether or not the Bible ever gave a record of a woman leader, this would be one person that would come to mind.

The 4th chapter of the book of Judges is the historical record. The 5th chapter is what we commonly call the song of Deborah, although the Scriptures say that Deborah and Barak sang this song. We should note that any qualities, any traits or capacities that Deborah may have had, were not described.

There is no clue as to anything about her which would be the basis of her call into this service. It is simply reported that she judged Israel. She was not called or made one of the elect on the basis of any comparison with rival persons. It was not a matter of her being chosen one out of a group.

The simple facts of Deborah's service were noted with no embellishment and no comment. Although she did serve as a leader, she was not called to be a woman military leader. She had a function and it is recorded in so many words: she judged Israel at that time. What this implies is that as a judge she administered the law of Moses. This implied that undoubtedly she was a wise woman. But no reference is made to her wisdom. She is not described as being wiser than anybody else. Yet we can be sure she undoubtedly was a wise practical woman because she served in this position as judge.

One wonders whether Deborah exemplifies the pattern of a woman according to what we have found so far in Scripture? I would say that she does. You will remember the nature of woman as it was outlined or indicated in the matter of Eve, who was actually created to be a helper equal to man. And this helping function is shown definitely in the case of Deborah. She helped Israel by identifying Barak to be king. In other words she was the one to whom was given the wisdom, and she was the one to whom was given that inward understanding of the will of God, that she could go and pick out this man Barak and see to it that he was put in the place of leadership over the whole nation, and made king. Yes, she did! She helped Israel.

Also she helped Barak by advising him to attack the king of Canaan. Now Barak was in the position of the practical leadership of the nation and Deborah was functioning as a judge, a person who has understanding and is wise. She helped Barak by telling him "Now is the time and this is the place, and there is the enemy. This is the time to go." And while we are saying that we can just say about Barak, he was a wise man. He was a smart man, a humble man. Why do I say all that? Because he was wise enough and smart enough and humble enough to take the advice of somebody that knew. That is what he did. She helped him by advising him to attack. We can go a bit further and find that so far as Barak was concerned, his wisdom went even further than that. Barak said to Deborah "I will not go unless you come along." This points out what I am saying about the wisdom of this man. He knew that this woman Deborah had unusual judgment: that she was a wise person. He realized that she had pointed him out, and had designated him to be the king. And now that he was to attack in battle, Barak was wise enough and smart enough to know that it would be a good thing to have Deborah along for advice. Deborah agreed to go. Here she was seen again in her helping role.

Let us consider now what we commonly call the song of Deborah. It is recorded in chapter 5. It was indicated that this was a victory song, and it was sung by Deborah and Barak. This woman served in her time, in her day among her people, and she served in a humble, true, faithful fashion. She was outstanding in wisdom and in judgment, and she led the people in understanding their way, but she had turned to Barak that he should be the practical executive, the military leader, When the victory was won, and the report of it put into this poem, the victory is ascribed to Deborah and Barak. In speaking of herself Deborah says, "I arose a mother in Israel." Thus we have an identification of this woman in these two chapters. The Scriptures themselves describe Deborah as the wife of Lapidoth.

The Scriptures, we have noted, presented Deborah as a wife and a mother, who served the nation in a place of leadership by exercising her judgment and guiding other people. At no point in this record, as we have carefully studied it, was there ever any confrontation between man and women as such. If that tendency should happen to develop in our culture, in our day and time, it would be a poor tactic to come back to this part of the Bible to try and find any encouragement for such confrontation. This part of the Bible does not make any distinction, no special emphasis, between men and women, as such. In this matter of leadership there was no polarization. There is no idea of giving any one person an advantage over another. That was not the idea.

Evidently in the providence of God He called one judge among twelve or thirteen judges who was

a woman. No human being should ever feel so far as woman was concerned that she was ever shut out from receiving the gifts of God. But in the actual functional affairs of the nation, we find that Deborah was an exception. We can come to a conclusion here for ourselves: a woman's function is to be a helper. That is what Deborah was. Such function may lead occasionally into leadership. I am quite sure there are some people who will feel that some of the ways in which I have set forth these comments, and the way in which I have pointed them out, will indicate that I am carrying a brief for a certain point of view in an argument about woman's equality with man. But all I want primarily to do is to point out to you what the Scriptures say. I greatly appreciate this woman Deborah. I think her name is great and her record is worthy. I am glad to see her name picked up every now and again by some family that name some baby girl "Deborah." Yet the fact is that her name was not mentioned in the honor roll of those who were people of faith in the 11th chapter of Hebrews, but Barak was.

And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets (Hebrews 11:32).

I do not want to undo any part of Deborah's fame, but I do want to recognize the situation as it was. She was a wonderful servant. She rendered a great service to her nation, and I do believe she was a real woman of God. And I do see her as a helper.

Faith of Two Widows

Have you ever realized that the classic expression of personal commitment of one person to another known as "Ruth's vow" was spoken by one woman to another woman?

This study will be focused upon the story of Ruth. This story gives a moving account of two widows, featured by three principle characters. It is a short book, only 4 chapters, but it tells us about Naomi, Ruth and Boaz. The story is something like this. Because of famine, a family from Judah migrated to Moab where there was food. There was a father and two sons and while they were in Moab these two sons married two Moabitess girls. The father and the two sons died, leaving Naomi a widow with two daughters-in-law. Naomi decided to go home to Judah. The famine was now gone and she told the two daughters-in-law to return to their homes because she would not be able to help them any further.

One daughter-in-law, a Moabitess by the name of Ruth, chose to go with her, pledging personal allegiance to her. When they got back to the country of Judah, Ruth requested permission to glean in the fields of Boaz, who was a kinsman of Naomi. Boaz saw her and arranged that she should be favored, telling the reapers to drop handfuls of grain in her territory that she might have extra result of her gleaning. When Naomi saw this she advised Ruth to go nowhere else in anybody else's field, but to stay there in the fields of Boaz day after day. Naomi guided her further to make close personal acquaintance with Boaz which she did in an unusual way.

Boaz respected the priority of other kinsmen when it came to the matter of doing something for this widow. Naomi and her daughter-in-law and the other kinsmen passed this option to Boaz, telling Boaz he could do what he wished. So with the knowledge and approval of the whole community, Boaz married Ruth. What makes this so interesting to us is that their son was the grandfather of David, the great king of Israel.

The conduct of Naomi, Ruth and Boaz each reflect trust in God. So let us first consider Naomi. What would there be about her that would show her trust in God? She accepted her fortune as it was. When the situation was such that she was left a widow in the land of Moab she realized that Judah was her home, and so she turned to go home, a very normal practical thing. And when she sent Ruth to glean after the harvesters in the fields of Boaz, this was also the natural, normal thing. When she recognized Boaz's

interest in Ruth, and felt that it was promising for the future, this was again a normal, natural thing. As she guided Ruth to put her in line to be blessed, everything that Naomi did was done according to the situation as it opened up before her. It may well be possible that we can take something to ourselves about that. Perhaps more than we ordinarily realize, our daily life is the very situation in which the providence of God can be seen and felt. It is in our daily round of activity that we can show our confidence and our trust in God by accepting things as they are, and practice "Whatsoever thy hands find to do, do it with all thy might." Trusting in God leads that way. By doing these things in this fashion, we actually demonstrate the fact that we trust in God who overrules all things. This is what Naomi did. All her conduct was simple, plain and reasonable. The things that were happening to her, were all in the providence of God.

Ruth was motivated in her conduct by her affection for Naomi, a natural affection. She chose to follow her. As she expressed in her vow, "Entreat me not to leave thee," Ruth asked Naomi to let her follow and let her be with her. The expression of those words was so very moving they have become famous in all literature.

Entreat 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 aught but death part thee and me (Ruth 1:16-17).

This was the expression, and it is a very fine, very beautiful expression of personal loyalty. Ruth committed herself to follow Naomi. She committed herself to be content with whatever her lot might be.

Ruth reported faithfully what happened when she was gleaning in the field. She came home and told her mother-in-law all that took place, and then she conducted herself just as she was directed by her mother-in-law. All the way through this record you find a quiet, humble, meek, willing person who is not thinking of herself as much as she is thinking of her mother-in-law. As we think about Boaz, we see that he maintained personal integrity. There are features of this story which are set in the culture of that day that we do not fully understand. We are not able to feel that we know really what the situation was with the kinsman and his people, or why the other man had priority in the matter of dealing with Naomi and with Ruth, because he was a closer relative. The record is that he finally came to Boaz and conceded his rights to him. Because Boaz was a relative he was allowed by the community to enter into a certain relationship with Naomi and Ruth. We do not understand all about that. We can feel the course of it. All the way through we find a man, an upright person, a man who conducted himself in the community in a way that everyone approved. When he saw Ruth, he was evidently attracted to her. He secured permission from society, as it were, for everything that he undertook to do. And in the course of it he did something unusual. He took a Moabitess to wife, because he loved her.

As we look at these three people, we are impressed by how each one of them demonstrated quiet, humble acceptance of the providential circumstances in which they lived. There was readiness to seek approval for the things that were being done. There was no outspoken open description of faith on the part of anyone of these in the way we ordinarily would think of faith. These three do not demonstrate any acceptance or dependence upon any spoken promise of God. But their record shows in the story as it unfolds that each one of them had a certain trust in God.

It is important to trust God, because then you can believe Him. When you trust God, you can accept situations as they are. These people accepted providence and they were led into situations that were far beyond what anyone would have thought might happen, far more than anyone would have expected. As the story is told, it concludes by reporting that the child of Boaz and Ruth became the grandfather of David, the great king. When you read the book of Ruth you see a demonstration of "trust and obey, for there is no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey." These people did not know the Gospel the way you and I know it, they did not have the story of Jesus Christ in their hearts and minds, but they had a certain revelation from God and they trusted in Him and obeyed the way the situation developed.

And so we observe you can obey God not so much because you take the particular words that He speaks, but when you accept the providence that you are in. The very situation you are in can be accepted as the will of God for you and then you can respond to that obediently as if you were responding to God. You will be blessed accordingly.

The Replacement – Esther

Can you believe that God is working in all events, even though His hand is not recognized?

Of all the books in the Bible this is the only one in which there is no mention of the name of God. The Jews were captives in a foreign land. The story is unfolded in a pagan palace where the emperor had a harem of concubines. The story itself is rather simple. The emperor whose name was Ahasuerus launched a round of revelry, in the course of which he made a request of his queen, whose name was Vashti. She denied the request. So it was decided that he would remove Vashti as queen and replace her. The king sent out his scouts, as it were, to search the land over for some maiden who would please the king and could be brought in as bride. This search to find a bride resulted in the finding of Esther, who was brought in. She pleased the king. So the king made her queen.

At the same time in this country there was a powerful political leader by the name of Haman. And this man Haman was offended by Esther's uncle whose name was Mordecai, because Mordecai refused to bow before Haman when he passed him. This offended Haman greatly. In order to get back at Mordecai, who was a very prominent Jew, Haman schemed to get the king's permission to liquidate all the Jews. This meant that all the Jews in the country were to be killed, and this would include Mordecai. The book of Esther tells how Haman managed it, and the king perhaps unwittingly, actually signed the decree that made it so.

When Mordecai heard this he wanted to gain Esther's attention. She was living in the king's palace. It was not proper for Mordecai to come into the king's palace, so he used a rather simple method to gain her attention. He dressed himself in sackcloth and ashes, and sat down in front of the palace gate, and mourned. Esther felt that it was unfitting for him to be dressed like that and acting like that. So she sent a servant out to tell him not to do that. But when Mordecai made contact with this servant, he sent a message in to Esther. He sent word to Esther that all the Jews were doomed. He told her that the king had signed a decree that would mean that all the Jews were to be killed. Mordecai challenged her to confront the king with this whole situation, and to ask him to countermand this order. Esther demurred about this request and sent back word to Mordecai to remind him that there was danger of going into the presence of the king when you had not been invited. And she had not been invited into the presence of the king in an official way in a long time. Such an act on her part would be dangerous.

Mordecai sent back a stern word. He told her:

Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews (Esther 4:13).

He pointed out to her that being a Jew she would be one of those who would be destroyed.

And then he added this famous line: Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this (Esther 4:14)?

When Esther was faced with this situation she prepared to do something about it. She did this by sending out word to Mordecai that he was to get his fellow Jews together to pray. She was going to fast and pray for three days, preparing herself for the going into the presence of the king. She called on Mordecai to get his men to join him in fasting and praying for three days. Then she would courageously venture to go in, making a statement that has been often quoted. She said that she was going in, and ended her

remarks by saying, "If I perish, I perish."

The result was that the Jews were spared. And it turned out that when the king found out what Haman had done, he hanged Haman on the gallows that Haman had built for Mordecai.

In this story we learn several things that we can apply for ourselves today. First of all we learn the providence of God. Perhaps the omission of the name of God in this book emphasizes the great truth in the story, namely the providence of God. There is no reference to any particular faith in God that Mordecai had, or any particular faith in God that Esther had. But there is evidence of the providence of God. So often this providence is unidentified, but it is always operative. That is true for me and that is true for you. God knows everything about you and God is able to watch over you. God is watching over you, and He has you in exactly the situation where He wants you to be.

Right there you can exercise your confidence and your trust in God, that God will overrule to bring His will to pass. God may let things happen to suit His purpose, some good things and some bad things. We can remember that Christ Jesus was sent to die for sinners. That was very real, very true. When you study that story, the story of the Lord Jesus Christ, you will see it is very obvious that this death of the Lord Jesus Christ was the result of the betrayal by Judas. Actually it was Judas in betraying Jesus of Nazareth that set up the cross, on which our Lord died for you and for me. No one ever thinks of giving Judas any credit for that. It is not coming to him. The truth is that God is able to overrule. God can make the wrath of man to praise Him.

Esther became the national heroine and was able to do her bit because of the king's lust. There is nothing nice about that part of the story. She was able to do what she did because of what the king had done. The whole development of the whole story is bewildering when you come to compare it just life for life. But all the way through there is evidence that the hand of God arranged things in such a way that Esther was able to do this work.

Now let us note what is seen in this same story about the works of men. We will not pay special attention to Mordecai, the uncle of Esther, who emerges as a very strong upright character. Nor will we specially think about Haman, who was an evil man and a wicked man. But let us look at Esther for a moment. Her courage was magnificent because you will notice that, in what she did, she denied herself. Her first reaction was to take care of herself. But when Mordecai pointed out what was actually at stake, she denied herself.

Esther's behavior indicates a certain confidence in God, because she gave herself over to fasting and prayer, but there was no personal assurance of success. Esther was not real sure that her praying would make a difference. She was not confident that she would be spared, because when she finally did say that she would go in she made that famous comment, "If I perish, I perish." So far as she was concerned it was possible that her action, would be denied. This was a wonderful demonstration of faith in action.

Believing in God is possible when you are sure about God. You may not be sure about the outcome. A believer can be sure about God, but he would not be cocksure about what he is doing. In the case of Esther her motivation was not an assurance of success, because she was not absolutely sure she would win. But it was obedience in the situation. The wonderful thing is that she went ahead and acted even though she did not know how it would turn out. It is not surprising that she became the national heroine of the Jewish race. They all look up to her and no wonder – she gave a display of courage and of self-denial that is inspiring to us even to this day.