

MEDITATION ON THE MARKS OF MOAB

During the time of the judges, the commonwealth of Israel was in a constant state of flux. Periods of spiritual idolatry would abound, followed by severe oppression from neighboring enemies, and then, deliverance by God through a spirit-filled leader. These cycles were repeated for approximately 300 years, and it was during one of these cycles, (perhaps at the time of Gideon; see Judges 6:3-4) that Naomi, whose name means “pleasant one,” her husband, and their two sons journeyed from the country of their birth, because of a severe famine in the land, and settled in the adjacent land of Moab.

In this land, far away from all that Naomi had ever known, she experienced horrendous difficulties and much sorrow. Her husband died and she was left responsible for her two sons. We can only imagine the grief in her heart as they chose to wed two women of Moab and then died themselves. Naomi may have found bread to eat in this alien land, but she was now far away from her people and her God. The hauntingly descriptive word she used to describe herself was “empty” (Ruth 1:21). Surely her past plagued her as she reviewed the decision to leave her family and friends; in effect, leaving the “land of the living” where God’s chosen were to abide faithful. As a result of that decision, she viewed her present circumstances as the judgment of God upon her and, by her own admission, the “pleasant one” had become depressed and bitter (1:20).

Had the account ended here, in the bleakness of despair, deliverance may not have come to Naomi or to her daughter-in-law, Ruth. But God never allows His people to remain in the darkness of despair without providing a way of escape. One day, a ray of hope penetrated the oppression of her circumstances, gave her a glimpse of forgiveness, and she was able to take that crucial first step back home.

We see in the account, however, that the restoration process had only begun when she crossed the geographical boundary. It was not only the passage of time, the facial lines of grief and worry, and the dejected countenance that elicited the question, “Is this Naomi?” (1:19) No, the marks of Moab had spread much deeper.

When we leave the protection and fellowship of the land of our second birth, which is heaven (Phil 3:20) and no longer set our affection there (Col 3:2), but choose to live in this world of sight, we begin to bear the marks of this world. Our friends change, as does our vocabulary and our choice of apparel. Our priorities change as we lose our enthusiasm for the things of the Lord. Our life becomes a progression of circumstances, without hope, as we fall victim to the rudiments of the world (Col 2:8). The words of God become irrelevant and eventually forgotten altogether and we come to rely upon our own wicked heart (Jer 17:9) and our seared conscience (1 Tim 4:2) to guide us through the perplexities of life without God.

The only remedy for our desperate condition is to hear these words and have the courage of Naomi to take the first step.

Jeremiah 3:22

Return, ye backsiding children, *and I will heal your backslidings.*

Only the Great Physician Himself can remove the marks of Moab.