

Stranger in a Strange Land

In *Casablanca*, Rick has fled Paris as it was overrun by the German army in June 1940, separating him from the woman he loved. He makes his way to French Morocco and opens an American style restaurant and casino which soon becomes very popular. This American adventurer intrigues the local police captain.

Captain Renault: "What in heaven's name brought you to Casablanca?"

Rick: "My health. I came to Casablanca for the waters."

Captain Renault: "The waters? What waters? We're in the desert."

Rick: "I was misinformed."

People end up one place or another for a variety of reasons. This week we will begin a study about an intriguing pair of women who also found themselves driven – or drawn – away from friends and family, away from all they knew as familiar. This is a story about God's work in the lives of these two people, and how that work extends beyond those women all the way to the redemption of creation itself.

Monday – Leaving Home

"Willing exile is exile nonetheless." Marion Zimmer Bradley, 20th c. American writer

1. Please read Ruth 1. According to verses 1-2, what is the make-up of this family? Why are they leaving home?
2. What do you think it meant to Naomi to have her husband and sons with her as she left her home?
3. Now look at Micah 5:2, a prophecy that came hundreds of years after Naomi's time. What importance is assigned to the town of Bethlehem? Who is that ruler and what is the associated significance of Naomi's move?

Text Insight: Naomi's family belonged to the Ephrathite clan within the tribe of Judah. Ephrathah is the man who founded the town of Bethlehem.

Tuesday – Returning Home

"Homeward bound, I wish I was." Paul Simon, American songwriter

1. Please read Ruth 1:3-7. Describe Naomi's life in Moab.

Text Insight: It is not clear when Naomi's husband died, how old their sons were when the family first came to Moab, how long they were each married before they died, or how long Naomi lived with their widows.

2. Assuming there was still food in Moab, why would Naomi want to return home after ten years instead of living among the relatives and friends of her daughters in law?
3. According to 2 Chronicles 7:13-14, what is significant about the end of a famine? How might this have influenced Naomi's decision to return home?

Making it Personal: Do you seek to be part of what God has blessed? Why or why not?

Wednesday – Hanging Together

"We must, indeed, all hang together or, most assuredly, we shall all hang separately." Benjamin Franklin

1. Please read Ruth 1:8-10. What is significant about Naomi's offer for the sake of her daughters in law? How would this have affected Naomi's life (imagine what the outlook of her life would be in that time without husband, sons, or even daughters-in-law)?
2. In Deuteronomy 10:17-19, how does God look upon people like Naomi, Ruth and Orpah? What should the women have been able to expect from God's people according to Deuteronomy 27:19?

Making it Personal: What do the Deuteronomy passages teach you about God's heart? How can you honor God in the way you care for those who are less well off than you are?

Thursday – Clinging On

"Devotion is neither more nor less than a prompt, fervent, loving service to God." Francis de Sales, 16th-17th c. French theologian

1. Please read Ruth 1:11-18. How did Naomi try to encourage the younger women to go home?
2. Now look at Deuteronomy 25:5-10. What might have happened if Naomi had a third son?
3. Read Ruth's response once again (vs.16-17). What does her response tell you about her love for Naomi? What role do you think God had in Ruth's response?

Digging Deeper (optional): Read Genesis 38:1-30, Ruth 4:18-22, and Matthew 1:1-3 & 16, and describe the importance of carrying on this family line. Why do you think this was so important in Hebrew culture?

Friday – Bitter News

"God is not a deceiver, that He should offer to support us, and then, when we lean upon Him, should slip away from us." Augustine, 4th-5th c. North African theologian

1. Please read Ruth 1:19-22. How did Naomi's friends react to seeing her again? How did Naomi respond?

Text Insight: Part of the evident surprise at seeing Naomi may have been because she and Ruth had just traveled over a hundred miles through desert and mountainous terrain without any men to protect them.

2. In Exodus 15:22-27, what did God do with the bitter water? What does this tell you about a possible reason Naomi chose the name Mara for herself?
3. Ruth's ethnicity is emphasized in verse 22. How might this reflect Ruth's feelings on arrival in Bethlehem?

Making it Personal: Have you experienced difficulties and tried to start over? Pray for God to care for you no matter what has happened or where you are.

For the Weekend: Read Exodus 2:11-22 and list the ways that God cared for Moses when he was driven away. Pray for God to care for you whenever you feel like "an alien in a foreign land" (v.22).