

Shadows of Christ & His Bride

Lesson #33

Leaving Bethlehem

October 1, 2025

Question: What are the results when Jesus is not the King of His People?

What are the results in my life when Jesus is not my Lord & King?

Prov. 16:25 There is a way that seems right unto a man,
but the end thereof are the ways of death.

Judges 21:25 In those days there was NO KING in Israel:
every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

Ruth 1:1-2 NOW it came to pass, in the days when the Judges Ruled,
that there was a famine in the land.

Now serves as a narrative marker that connects the events of the book to the historical and theological context of the preceding Book of Judges. It sets the stage for a story that stands in stark contrast to the chaos and unfaithfulness of the judges' era.

Highlights irony. The book opens with a famine in "Bethlehem," which means "House of Bread." The irony of a famine in the "House of Bread" serves as a powerful symbol for the spiritual emptiness of the judges' period.

Ruth 1:1-5 Now it came to pass, in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem, Judah, went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. ² The name of the man was Elimelech, the name of his wife was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion—Ephrathites of Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to the country of Moab and remained there.

And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons.

⁴ And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years.

⁵ And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them;
and the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

Ruth 1:1 Now it came to pass, in the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. God's judgment upon Israel for its Idolatry And Rebellion during the time of the judges:

- This was exactly the situation the law of Moses was meant to remedy.
- Famine was one of the curses given if Israel broke the covenant God had made with them.

Deut. 28:23-24 tells what will happen if Israel breaks the covenant God had made with them: The skies above will be as unyielding as bronze, and the earth beneath will be as hard as iron. ²⁴ The Lord will change the rain that falls on your land into powder, and dust will pour down from the sky until you are destroyed.

- Israel is not suffering a series of unfortunate events. The people are under a curse.

Note: There is NO reference to God in these opening verses in Ruth 1.

Ruth 1 sets the Need For Redemption by first exposing the sins of the Jews in this story.

- Elimelech sinned by taking his family out of the Promised Land and moving to Moab.
- Elimelech's sons sinned by marrying Moabite women, something which God prohibited. They died 10 years later without any children.
- Naomi sinned by blaming God for the self-imposed tragedies on her people.

Tragedy: So, a man from Bethlehem, Judah left his home...

A. Bethlehem, the "house of bread," was a place where God promised abundance [Deut. 8:9].

John 6:35 And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life:

He that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst.

Key: This connects the literal "House of Bread" to the spiritual sustenance found in Him.

John 10:10 The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy:

I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

Instead of seeking God's guidance, Elimelech chose Moab, a land known for pride & laziness.

The Moabites were the result of the initiative and immorality of Lot's oldest daughter.

After the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot and his daughters settled in the region near Zoar. Fearing a lack of descendants, they got Lot drunk and each slept with him, resulting in the birth of Moab and his brother Ben-Ammi, the ancestor of the Ammonites. [Fear resulted in man's plan; man's way]

The Moabites settled in the land east of the Dead Sea, where they developed a distinctive pagan culture worshipping the god Chemosh by sacrificing their children to it. They are highlighted in the Bible for their pride and idolatry.

Isa. 16:6 focuses on Moab's excessive pride, arrogance, and conceit.

- Moab's proud pronouncements and boasts were meaningless.
- Connects Moab's pride to their eventual downfall and the loss of their wealth and status.
- It contrasts the empty pride of humans with the need for confidence in God and His righteousness.

Dwight L. Moody: God sends no one away except those who are full of themselves.

Jer. 48:11 uses a metaphor of undisturbed wine to describe the nation of Moab,

- They have been in a state of complacent ease since their youth.
- They have been like wine left to sit on its sediment (dregs), which allows it to remain undisturbed and rich, but also stagnant and unpurified.
- They haven't experienced the hardship and purification that would come from being moved from place to place or experiencing captivity.

B. The king of Israel will come from the tribe of Judah.

This king will rule the whole world and bring prosperity to Israel.

Key: By leaving the Promised Land and his people, Elimelech is showing his disbelief and rejection of this promise. Like Lot and Esau, Elimelech shows no interest in God's promise and rejects his role in God's plan to bring blessing to the world.

- The pattern in the Bible: Sin leads to exile from God's presence.
- Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden to live east of Eden.
- Later Israel would be conquered by the Babylonians and marched into captivity.

Key: One of the ways the Old Testament makes its point is through repetition.

The rejection of God's law and promise leads to exile from His provision and His presence.

Reminder: The Promised Land is a picture of our abundant life where God promises, as we surrender to Him, He will fight our battles, give us victory over sin in our lives, refine us and conform us to the image of Jesus Christ.

John 10:10 The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy:

I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

Ruth 1:2 They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in the land of Judah.

Significance of Ephrathites of Bethlehem, Judah: Their direct connection to Bethlehem, the prophesied birthplace of the Messiah, and their pivotal role in the Biblical narrative of redemption.

This lineage includes King David, an Ephrathite, establishing the royal line from which Jesus, the Messiah, is descended. The Ephrathite identity highlights God's choice of a humble town for significant events and underscores the enduring significance of God's covenant faithfulness and plan for humanity through the Ephrathite roots.

Messianic Prophecy and Fulfillment: The Ephrathites are intrinsically linked to the prophecy in Micah 5:2, which foretells that a ruler over Israel would come from Bethlehem.

This prophecy was fulfilled in the New Testament when Jesus, the Messiah, was born in Bethlehem, making the Ephrathite lineage a cornerstone of Christian theology.

Part of God's Redemptive Plan: Through the narratives of figures like Ruth and Naomi and the family of Elimelech, the Ephrathites demonstrate the unfolding of God's redemptive plan. Ruth's loyalty to the Ephrathite community and her marriage to Boaz placed her in the direct lineage of David and the Messiah.

The related ancient name for Bethlehem [House of Bread], Ephratah, means "fruitful," suggesting a connection between the two concepts, with the prophetic meaning of fruitfulness being associated with the land itself and the spiritual fruit of eternal life through Christ.

Bethlehem: A Symbol of God's Word.

Truth: To depart from God's Bread is to take a giant step downward! Leads to Sorrow! Scripture constantly talks about finding God's Word ... and eating it, consuming it, internalizing it, chewing and meditating on it day and night!

God's Instructions to Joshua for success in conquering the enemies in their inheritance.

Joshua 1:8 This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous and then thou shalt have good success.

As a Christian you **MUST** have the Bread, the Word of God, He provides on a daily basis!
Don't let anything take the place of the Bible (Bread) in your life!

Honor it as the written Word that tells you of Jesus, the Living Word!

Ps. 119:147 I rise before the dawning of the morning, And cry for help; I hope in Your Word.

James 1:21b receive with meekness the engrafted Word, which is able to save your souls.

Choosing To Leave Bethlehem, the House of Bread

Tragedy: So a man from Bethlehem in Judah left his home and went to sojourn in the country of Moab, taking his wife and two sons with him. ² The man's name was Elimelech, and his wife was Naomi. Their two sons were Mahlon and Kilion.

The Prodigal Family: Elimelech = My God Is King

Naomi = Pleasant

Mahlon = Weakness

Chilion = Wasting Away

Elimelech had two choices.

1. Be true to his name, which means "my God is King." Remain in Judah, repent with all the people, turn back to God for forgiveness, and trust God for provisions.
2. Leave for the "greener pastures" in Moab where there is plenty of food.

Elimelech's Response To The Famine: Leave Bethlehem, Judah and sojourn in Moab.

- He is living according to the spirit of his day: "doing what is right in my own eyes."

Phil. 4:19 But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Focus on God's Glory: The ultimate purpose of this promise is to bring glory to God, highlighting His abundant provision and faithfulness.

Powerful Truth: This response is a sin because it was an act of disobedience to God.

- By leaving Bethlehem, he was rejecting God's leadership and the covenant He made with His people to provide for them **IN THEIR PROMISED LAND**.

By fleeing the famine, he abandoned his people and inheritance, failed to trust in God's provision. Ultimately, he led his family into a place of idolatry, resulting in his own death and tragedy for his family.

Key: Elimelech left God's presence and God's people because things were hard.

He made a choice to live among "*wicked, great sinners against the Lord*" in Moab.

- They left this place of *God's provision* for Moab, which is the land of Lot's descendants - not the Promised Land, and not God's chosen people.

Departing from God's Will & God's Way

Elimelech "left" Bethlehem, Judah, his possessions and style of life.

A famine had gripped the land, and he moved to the most ungodly place he could find!

He left Bethlehem Judah [meaning God's House Of Bread in the Land Of Praise] and went to Moab [meaning I am my Grandfather's child...Lot] to live!

Truth: Elimelech left the inheritance God gave him ... moved to sin city ... and soon died!

His 2 sons died. He left a widow without any visible means of support!

Ruth 1:1 opens with the word "NOW!" It is a literary "tool" to show "linkage" to the previous Scripture, even though in another Book. The two previous Bible accounts ending the Book of Judges are also about People Who Left Bethlehem ... and met disaster!

Three times in a row [Judges 17-18; 19-21; Ruth 1:1-5] God's Word illustrates for us

- STAY where God's Bread is found! Stay there even during the hard times!
- Do not leave the land of Praise and the House of Bread for any reason!

Judges 17:6-7 In those days *there was* no king in Israel; everyone did *what was* right in his own eyes. ⁷ Now there was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah; he was a Levite and was sojourning there.

The mention of his familial lineage is significant because it connects him to the tribe of Judah, which plays a central role in the lineage of Jesus Christ.

He was a Levite of the priestly tribe chosen by God to serve in the tabernacle

Judges 17:8 And the man departed out of the city from Bethlehemjudah to sojourn where he could find a place: and he came to mount Ephraim to the house of Micah, as he journeyed.

As soon as the young Levite left God's House of Bread, Bethlehem, he linked up with a scoundrel! Micah was a thief and an idolater

- Then he allowed himself to be "hired" as Micah's "priest!" A "hireling!" Priest for sale!

Hired Service: He agreed to serve Micah as a father and priest in exchange for a yearly salary, a suit of clothes, and his living expenses.

Role in Micah's Idolatry: He served as the priest in Micah's private shrine, which contained carved idols and household gods, reflecting the widespread religious confusion of the time. Soon he found himself "hired" (more money, better opportunity, sweeter benefits) by a bunch of renegade Danites, Jews from the Tribe of Dan. Then he participated (by assent, by compromise, by approval, by refusing to rebuke sin) in outright murder!

Now he's the "preacher" for a group of hateful, murderous, lying, stealing people who sin incessantly. They mixed Jehovah worship with the corrupt idolatrous practices of the wicked who lived nearby!

- Another tragedy ... brought on by leaving Bethlehem!

The closing chapters of Judges contain some of the most gruesome accounts in the Bible.

- Homosexual Benjamites want to rape a guest in their city.
- A woman is brutally gang raped by these same men.
- Her husband seems more than willing to sacrifice her to save his life.
- He chops her dead body into twelve pieces which he delivers to every part of Israel.

The tribe of Benjamin faced near destruction due to this terrible incident. As a result, the other tribes of Israel declared war on Benjamin and decimated their numbers.

After the war, the Israelites were distressed by the fact that they had almost wiped out one of the tribes of Israel and were concerned about the future of the tribe of Benjamin.

They recognized that if the tribe of Benjamin was completely destroyed, it would lead to an imbalance in the distribution of territory among the tribes of Israel. Need some women!

Attack the city of Jabesh-Gilead. The Israelites discovered that the people of Jabesh-Gilead had not joined the assembly at Mizpah, where the vow not to give daughters to the Benjamites was made. As punishment, the Israelites slaughtered most of the inhabitants but spared 400 young virgins, whom they gave to the Benjamite survivors as wives.

However, this did not provide enough women for all 600 Benjamite men.

Kidnap women from Shiloh. For the remaining 200 Benjamites, the Israelite elders devised a second plan. They instructed the men to hide in the vineyards during a festival in Shiloh.

When the young women of Shiloh came out to perform their dances, the Benjamites were to rush out, seize a wife for themselves, and take her back to their territory.

The elders rationalized that this kidnapping would not violate their oath because the women were "taken" and not "given".

There are times when the land of Moab looks inviting. You look to Moab to escape your circumstances, a trial that has come your way.

The land of Moab is the place of your solutions to your problems.

The land of Moab today may be a church which seems to have it all together - activities, programs - and they accept all kinds of differences on doctrinal, crucial issues.

But they do not preach the pure Word of God. "Wouldn't it be easier to go to that church?"

Welcome to the land of Moab! It is always around us. The land of Moab is when we crave to go away from the true Word of God and from the true church of Jesus Christ and think that life will be better if we first look to our own earthly needs and happiness.

Warning: The solutions in Moab will cause you to compromise God's Word.

Consider: It has been said, "If you get on the wrong train, get off at the first stop.

The longer you stay on, the more the return trip is going to cost you.

- They weren't talking about trains...

II Cor. 12:7 Paul said, Because of the extraordinary greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! [NASB]

Reasons Why God Is Allowing Your Trial

1. To keep me humble.

Prov. 16:18 Pride goes before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.

2. To keep me in training.

Olympic runners aren't built without sprinting through walls, forging through exhaustion and getting up again when they want to quit.

It is in the pain that we find our greatest spiritual gains - to become more and more like Christ.

James 1:2-3 Consider it nothing but joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you fall into various trials. ³ Be assured that the testing of your faith [through experience] produces endurance [leading to spiritual maturity, and inner peace]. ⁴ And let endurance have its perfect result and do a thorough work, so that you may be perfect and completely developed [in your faith], lacking in nothing. [Amplified]

3. To gift me with the grace of God.

It often takes the face of crisis to see the smile of God's grace over you.

➤ "God, your grace and mercy brought me through."

4. To make me start thinking spiritually, not carnally.

When you have nothing left, you start to see all that is left - and all that matters - God.

When you are at the end of your rope, God is waiting for you to stop fighting Him.

➤ God's address is at the end of your rope.

Eph. 4:22-23 Strip yourselves of your former nature.... And be constantly renewed in the spirit of your mind [having a fresh mental and spiritual attitude].

➤ What does God need to strip away from me? Circumcise my heart. Renew my mind.

5. To develop me into eternal gold, not rotting dollar bills.

I Pet. 1:7 These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

The Loaves and the Lake

Jesus feeding the 5000 is the only miracle recorded in all four gospels—other than the resurrection. Why so significant?

Jesus never intended to create frustration—but rather to teach dependence. Jesus took the small amount of food they had, blessed it, and divided it sufficiently among the crowds.

Point? Dependence on Jesus, not yourself or your own resources. God Is Able!

Eph. 3:20 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us,

Mark 6:45-46 Immediately He made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while He sent the multitude away.

After bidding them farewell, He left for the mountain to pray.

Cue an unexpected storm. They panicked and did all they could to fight the impossible tempest.

Jesus showed up and calmed the storm.

Mark 6:51-52 And He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped; and they were greatly astonished, for they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened. They should have remembered their inadequacy with the loaves and Jesus' power to provide.

Chuck Swindoll We are all faced with a series of opportunities that are brilliantly disguised as impossible situations.

We must grasp what we learn from God in one situation applies to all circumstances.

- When you see God provide financially, relate that to your struggles with your kids.
- In times when God encourages you with a quick answered prayer for a friend, relate it to the person for whom you've been praying for years.
- When you realize how God used pain in your past to make you a stronger person, apply it to the pain you struggle with now.

Relate the loaves to the lake. Connect what you learn about God's faithfulness in one area to all other areas of your life.

You will only discover the power of God if you continually bring your inadequacies to Jesus and refuse to rely on yourself.

W. Stiles *We won't experience the joy of God's power if we keep running from impossible situations.*

"OK, God," I prayed, "I've been through a lot lately. How in the world are you showing me you love me?" In an instant, the answer came. I felt God say, "I'm walking through the storm with you, and I'm giving you my umbrella." [from the book, *Captivating*]

God to me: You KNOW you have no more emotional energy to throw at this.

No, the solution is NOT more DOING. Come to Me. Be with Me. I am the solution."

Key: The umbrella doesn't make the storm go away.

God's umbrella has kept me from getting soaked. It has given me peace, hope, and even joy in the midst of the hardest time I've ever faced. But I'm still in a storm.

It's OK to say I'm struggling. God gets more glory when people know I am in a storm and He's the only reason I'm making it through.

Learning how to stay under that umbrella of supernatural grace is essential for survival.

The instant one little toe wanders outside that covering, the weight of decades of weariness and waiting—or far worse—will come crashing down upon me.

"There are still times when I walk right out from under the covering God has given me.

I get frustrated, scared, and angry. So I walk out into the storm.

I notice sadness creeping in, hope disappearing, and I look down to find I'm soaking wet.

That's when I need to head back to God's umbrella to dry off again."

Prov. 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

⁶ In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

We don't need to see the path or imagine what the path *might* look like or give the Lord suggestions as to where we think the path should lead.

Mark 10:27 *With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God.*

Ps. 105:19 Until the time that his word [of prophecy regarding his brothers] came true,

The word of the Lord tested and refined him. [him = Joseph]

The Word says we are to be made Kings and Priests and serve Jesus Christ our King in His Kingdom. The Word says we are to be the Bride of Christ and rule and reign with Him.

➤ So, until this comes true, God is testing and refining us.

II Tim. 2:1, 3-5 Timothy, my dear son, be strong through the grace that God gives you in Christ Jesus. ³ Endure suffering along with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴ Soldiers don't get tied up in the affairs of civilian life, for then they cannot please the officer who enlisted them. ⁵ And athletes cannot win the prize unless they follow the rules.

Habakkuk and the Fig Trees

Hab. 3:17-19 Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vines; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation! The Lord God is my strength [my source of courage, my invincible army]; He has made my feet [steady and sure] like hinds' feet and makes me walk [forward with spiritual confidence] on my high places [of challenge and responsibility].

This verse reflects a theme of despair and hopelessness. In the face of such devastation, it can be easy to lose faith and succumb to despair. However, this verse also carries a powerful message of trust and reliance on God. Despite the bleak circumstances, Habakkuk's prayer demonstrates his unwavering faith that God will provide and sustain him.

Have you experienced His grace, His peace, His strength
to Endure The Trials & Storms in your life?

Have you experienced the type of grace from God that allows you to live in the peace of knowing you are obeying Him, even when those around you don't understand?"

I must choose to stay under God's umbrella

Truth: There is NO storm that God will not carry you through. NO bridge that God will not help you cross. NO battle that God will not help you win. Trust God! Never give up!

Sometimes the storm in my life feels like it will never end.

Faith Over Fear: Trusting God's provision ensures stability even during trials.

I feel the touch of hands so kind and tender.
They're leading me in the paths that I must trod.
I'll have no fear when Jesus walks beside me
For I'm sheltered in the arms of God.
So let the storm rage high, The dark clouds rise, They don't worry me;
For I'm sheltered safe in the arms of God.
He walks with me, And naught of earth can harm me,
Sheltered safe within the arms of God.

I don't know what plight, trial, test or challenge you are facing. Be encouraged to hold on!
Ps. 34:19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivers him out of them all.
Jer. 32:37 Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there anything too hard for me?