

Perhaps it RUTH - ORPAH, out of a consoling love for Naomi's son, may have paid lip-service to the Hebrew faith and tradition. In the study of the Book of Ruth, there is a tendency to gloss over the tremendous contribution which is made by the "other" daughter-in-law, Orpah. The unfailing loyalty of Ruth is contrasted by the uncertain devotion of Orpah. The self sacrificing nature of Ruth becomes more lovely when contrasted with the self consideration of Orpah. The following article shows how the story of Ruth is enhanced by the dexterous interweaving of a contrasting element, Orpah, speaking. Although the way was hazardous and forbidding, surely the time co Let us now consider the story of Ruth to discover what qualities of contrast exist that highlight this unsurpassed classic idyll in the realm of the world's literature. When Naomi, advanced in years, decided to leave the land of Moab, she was living with both of her daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth. Naomi longed to leave the land where she had sustained the tragic loss of her husband and both of her sons. More than anything, Naomi wished to return to her childhood home, to the comfort of her former friends, and to the solace of a community which shared her own religious convictions. We must remember that not only was Moab a country of different social customs, but it suffered also from an idol-worshipping, child-sacrificing religious cult that dominated the whole community.

Actually, a full understanding of this particular point permits a greater appreciation for the story of Ruth. Before Orpah and Ruth could marry the Hebrew Chilion and Mahlon, it was necessary that they give up the barbarism of their native religious beliefs. It was necessary that they become converts. Both had done this. Perhaps in this fact we can arrive at one explanation of why only one of the girls was able to assume the full weight of her moral responsibilities. Having nature, rejected the thought of permitting Naomi, who was not WHAT WAS THE DIFFERENCE IN STRENGTH OF CHARACTER? to make the journey alone.

There must be some explanation for the difference in the strength of character and degree of allegiance displayed by the two young women when faced by the same challenge. Could it be that actually Orpah did not have the same depth of religious conviction as did Ruth? What made Orpah turn her back on the aged Naomi and her new found beliefs and return to seek her own self-interest in the savage country of her birth? responding to a genuine, overwhelming love for Naomi. After their arrival, Ruth could not do anything

Perhaps it was that Orpah, out of a consuming love for Naomi's son, may have paid lip-service to the Hebrew faith and traditions. Perhaps she was essentially a more self-centered individual and valued her own gratified nature more than she valued the welfare of the woman who had given life itself to the man she loved.

Orpah could have made this short journey without altering, materially, her position in Moab. The thirty odd miles to be covered could have been accomplished in a short length of time, comparatively speaking. Although the way was hazardous and forbidding, surely the time consumed could not have been considered as detracting from her marriage-ability by adding years to her life.

It would seem that ^{any} individual genuinely converted to the early Hebrew beliefs would have welcomed the very fine opportunity to at least visit the home land of this religion. If or no other reason, it seems that Orpah could have found cause enough to go to Bethlehem, solely for the sake of seeing the shrines, altars, and temples of her newly embraced religion.

When we put the question in terms of present day beliefs, we become genuinely surprised at Orpah's decision to remain behind. What present day Christian would not, if physically able, walk thirty miles to see, for instance, the birthplace of Christ and the land of His Teachings and Preachings?

CONTRAST BECOMES MOST STRIKING

The contrast between the behavior of Ruth and Orpah is most striking. Surely, the faith of Ruth was not of a will-of-the-wisp nature. It was constant, fortifying, and vital. She was utterly unable to even entertain the idea of deserting Naomi. Ruth's compassionate, loving nature, rejected the thought of permitting Naomi, who was not only her mother-in-law but also a beloved friend, to make the journey alone.

Not only did Ruth make the journey but she also made herself an integral, contributing member of her adopted Hebrew community. Had Ruth been responding to a sense of compulsion, she might well have escorted Naomi to her homeland and left her to her own devices. She might well have done as little as possible to see her duty done, and then returned to her native land to seek more rewarding and fortunate circumstances. However, Ruth was responding to a genuine, overwhelming love for Naomi. After their arrival, Ruth could not do anything

but continue in her efforts to care for her friend, even when it was necessary to do common labor in the grain fields.

Ruth's real contribution to our understanding of true values is greatly enhanced by the contrast provided by an analysis of Orpah's negative response to the needs of Naomi. One cannot help but wonder if Ruth ever intuited that she and Boaz, in giving life to their beloved son, were part of the ancestral line of the House of David and ultimately of that of Christ.

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