

“Let go of your Chancleta”

Just follow the money. We've all heard that. But I'm not talking about money. Ever wondered what that peculiar phrase “E Pluribus Unum” means? It is on all of our coinage. Did you know, it expresses a truth originating in ancient Israel, when a widowed girl did something remarkable; something, quite honestly is unheard of today. Here is the story!

There was an older Israelite woman named Naomi. Her family left the Promised Land (Israel) during a famine. In Moab, there was a food supply during such famine. Naomi was married, with two sons. These sons had married Moabite women during their stay. After ten years, Naomi lost her husband, and both sons. This left her with two widowed daughter-in-laws. Naomi urged them to find husbands in Moab, whereas she would travel home to Israel alone; food supplies had reached Israel, so Naomi resolved to return. But Ruth had compassion on her widowed mother in law, and decided that she should “cling” to her and to accompany her. Not only did she feel compassion for Naomi, but she felt a spiritual connection with the Promised Land. Moabites did not consider Israel to be “God's country”. They had their own Gods. Nor did the Ammonites, or any other tribe, have any respect for Israel. To the contrary.

Ruth could have stayed put, where it was easy. She could have found another husband (we find later that she was not ugly) in Moab; stayed comfortable in her “church”, or her “town”, “village” and just do the easy thing. But Ruth was special. That is why a book in the bible is dedicated to her. Beholding the weeping widow, whom she knew for at least ten years, Ruth said:

(Ruth 1:16-17)

“...Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.”

What is being expressed here, is not the sole importance of family; rather, the indispensable value of nationality—the spiritual essence of a nation that embraces the foreigner. This is purely a biblical theme and historical fact—a nation which prides itself on diversity, law, liberty and compassion. The Latin phrase on our money, “E Pluribus Unum”, translates as “out of many, one”. Like a family is built on many ethnicities/nationalities, it still functions as one unit. Likewise, a “Promised Land” is built by “many” peoples, yet still functions as one nation. *“One nation, under God”*.

Israel did not reject Ruth because she was a Moabite. On the flip side (of the coin), Ruth no longer embraced her longstanding heritage as a Moabite. Ruth left it all behind, because she knew in her spirit, that there was something special about Israel. Why else would a young girl leave her safety blanket, and voyage alone in the wilderness with an aging mother in law who had no provision or protection? Faith. Ruth was faithful to her dead husband's mother. She was faithful to her family. But this seed of faith would blossom into fruit of national proportions—this seed would produce fruit for all nations on earth.

Isaiah 27:6 - In days to come Jacob will take root, Israel will bud and blossom and fill all the world with fruit.

In 1948, Israel emerged again as a nation after WWII. The inhabitants turned a desert into a thriving land with fruit. Via ingenious irrigation techniques, Israel became a major exporter of citrus throughout the world. The prophet Isaiah was born in the 8th century BC. This prophesy was written nearly three millennium beforehand. Yet look at how quickly Ruth's sincere actions came to bless her.

Having affections for something better than "the land of my family", Ruth prospered. You might disagree. Maybe she was clinging to her mother-in-law Naomi, because Naomi was the closest thing to a mother she had? Maybe she pitied the old widow because she had nobody? Maybe Ruth was an abused woman who would rather live with an in-law than risk another Moabite man? Or, maybe she felt the spiritual curse of Moab, and saw a prime opportunity to leave!

How many Syrians, Bosnians, Somalis and others have poured into America in recent times? Between 1830 and 1924, 36-Million people emigrated to the United States. These masses abandoned their own personal "Moab" for similar reasons: marriage, religious liberty, asylum, etc. America was the "breadbasket" of the world, and the quintessential example of a place to go during famine. Here is a quote from a non-Christian author, Colin Woodard:

"...being 'American' had nothing to do with one's ethnicity, religion, or language but was rather a spirit or state of mind..." (American nations)

This is exactly how God created designed Israel—out of many, one nation. Israel included Egyptians, Moabites, Jebusites, Babylonians, and every swath of peoples that lived in that part of the world. Ruth was not the first foreigner. Many before her "naturalized" into something new, embracing an idea greater than their country of origin. When Ruth made that journey, she was fully embracing a new nationality. A new state of mind. A new God. A spiritual identity. A citizenship that came with a heavenly reward, as well as an earthy model. Her statement here is paramount:

"Your people will be my people, and your God my God".

In contemporary times, Ruth is equivocally saying, "I am an Israelite first, and a Moabite second". Like immigrants who say, "I'm American first, and European second". Or "I am an American first, and an African second". Or "I am an American first, and a *fill-in-the-blank* second". She is not renouncing, or denying her Moabite bloodline, but she certainly isn't boasting about it either. If you interpret the bible literally, Moab was not a nation to be proud of—their customs and laws were not something to be proud of. Israel's laws and customs were the gold-standard (whether they followed them or not). Most immigrants, like Ruth, are proud to become part of something better. Our cultural heritage, or our unique preferences must come second to the "Promised Land" (land of E Pluribus Unum). Here, we have laws that cannot be broken. A constitution that binds us together as one people. I find it interesting that I am writing this on the first snow day of the year:

Psalms 147:16-20

He spreads the snow like wool and scatters the frost like ashes. He hurls down his hail like pebbles. Who can withstand his icy blast? He sends his word and melts them; he stirs up his breezes, and the waters flow. He has revealed his word to Jacob, his laws and decrees to Israel. He has done this for no other nation; they do not know his laws.

The whole is greater than the parts, and this is what “E Pluribus Unum” is all about. All of Western civilization (and similar nations) have been built on Judeo-Christian laws and principles. This took millennium for humanity to arrive at this point of prosperity. In Ruth’s time, Israel was ruled by chieftains called judges. They had divisions and wars of their own. Regardless, the laws of Israel worked in Ruth’s favor (foreigner), and in Naomi’s (native) favor. What is good for one, must be good for all.

Ruth 4:7-8

(Now in earlier times in Israel, for the redemption and transfer of property to become final, one party took off his sandal and gave it to the other. This was the method of legalizing transactions in Israel.)

So the guardian-redeemer said to Boaz, “Buy it yourself.” And he removed his sandal.

I think of my own wife—she is from Puerto Rico. She used to joke about how mothers on the Island would chuck sandals at disobedient kids. Sort of like a custom. If a child was acting out, a mother would throw the “chancleta” at such child. “Chancleta” means flip-flop, or sandal. It is almost as if this scripture is speaking directly to us. The removal of the sandal. It was a spiritual-legal act. It makes me think of Carmen’s great grandmother, who left Puerto Rico right before the hurricane. She “took off the sandal” so to speak, and was able to move to Fort Wayne in safety and comfort. In 2019, our entire family joined together for a thanksgiving carry-in at Kingston retirement community. We ate a fine meal as “one” people, and celebrated great grandma’s life. I’m so thankful she arrived when she did. Had great-grandma held on to her “chancleta”—her home, her Puerto Rican heritage or any other object which tugged on her soul after 80+ years there she might have been washed away in that terrible Hurricane. This ties in directly with Ruth.

(Ruth 4:11-12)

*Then the elders and all the people at the gate said, “We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, **who together built up the family of Israel**. May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. Through the offspring the Lord gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.”*

Ruth’s physical-emotional abandonment of Moab proved to be fruitful. She not only entered the land of plenty, but found a wealthy husband. Children. Ruth became a wealthy citizen with great “standing”; great influence—famous actually! Her faithfulness to her family, and her humble submission to her men positioned her in a way no Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, social media platform or local church could possibly position her. She modeled the great women who came before her—Rachel and Leah—women **“who together built up the family of Israel”**. The text is literally equating a

family with a nation in this passage. “Family of Israel” or “house of Israel” was the original way of saying “E Pluribus Unum”. Then, like now, the family is called to build up the nation. Getting married and serving the greater cause of the nation. This is how Ruth and Boaz got famous. They were like a celebrity couple who went viral in politics and business. They had a son who became the father of King David’s father. This meant Generational leadership, generational wealth...and even the lineage of Jesus Christ! Perez was the twin of Tamar, and through his line came the Messiah. You might say that the elders are asking this family to “be like that of Jesus” (because Jesus came from the line of Perez). Take special notice now—the male leaders (elders) are asking God to bless the immigrant wife Ruth, and to make her like the **founding mothers of this great country**. The men recognize the contributions of the founding matriarchs. Who are the American Matriarchs who “together built up the family of our great Israel”? What happens next?

Ruth 4:13-15

*So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When he made love to her, the Lord enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. The women said to Naomi: “Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer. **May he become famous throughout Israel!** He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth.”*

The marriage is consummated, and a son is conceived. The women declare that this daughter in-law (Ruth) has done better for Naomi than seven sons! Again, I think of my dear wife Carmen—whenever my Dad is in town, or on the phone, he flatters Carmen routinely when he says “my favorite daughter in law”. Of course, he can safely say this, because Carmen is his *only* daughter in law (my other brother is not married). And, like Ruth, she came from a different land. But now she is here in America, and she has given him three grandchildren by myself! Had she stayed in Puerto Rico, there would be no twins (Cody & Chris), Sophia, JJ, Haddie or Jed!

These themes are easily missed—first the men bless the women. Then, the women take a turn to bless the men. There is no competition of the genders. There is no gender affirmation, but a solemn acknowledgement of this “E Pluribus Unum”. The “family of Israel”. *That the nation is the family, and the family is the nation*. That out of many peoples, God made one enormous family-nation-Promised - Land. We must examine the role models of history; we must stop studying the bible in the abstract, and do what it says. Do what these people modeled. To think that all this was set into motion when Ruth loved her mother in law—that all the blessings came when one Israelite let go of their pride, culture and personal identity—their “chancleta”. Marriage. Immigration. Nation building. Isn’t that what Abraham modeled?

It is time for all of us to “let go of our chancleta”. To let go of our claims to our country of origin. To let go of our cultural identities that are not congruent with God’s truth. We can keep our food, songs and other niceties we brought here—good things that do not detract from the E Pluribus Unum. But we must stop finding worth in our bloodlines or family tree. To accept that God still is the God of America; that America was His idea—that He builds families as a beautiful way of building Promise

Lands. And, if we really love Jesus Christ, that we will not tear down His family, but together, all build up the family of Israel.