



NON-PROFIT



TAX-EXEMPT

“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” MARK 16:15

December 2020

## FROM US TO YOU

It's the Christmas season and, despite everything, it is supposed to be a happy time of year. For it is when Christians have traditionally celebrated the holy gift that God gave to us. *“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him”* (John 3:16-17 NIV). Christmas is not about worldly things, like Santa Clause, sleighs, reindeer, and gluttony. *“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world”* (1 John 2:15-16 NIV). Christmas is about the Creator of all things loving us, this fallen, sinful human race, enough to sacrifice the one thing He cherished the most, His beloved Son. We humans were without hope, spiritually dead, and slaves to sin (Romans 6:6,19). God knew the pathetic state we were in, and had compassion on us. For we were all heading for an eternity of separation from Him, who loves us so much. We all know about the evil that is in this world. The Bible says it is caused by human sin.

God made this world made perfect for us (Genesis 1:31). Then Adam and Eve were created. Within Adam's body was the seed of all human life. However, our original parents disobeyed God and listened to the lies of Satan, God's enemy. By doing so, they doomed us all into an eternity of servitude to the devil. *“Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?”* (Romans 6:16 NIV. Also, see Ephesians 2:2-5). However, Satan will spend all eternity in Hell (Revelation 20:10). So will all humans that are his slaves. *“And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire”* (Revelation 20:12-15 NIV). Moreover, twentieth century scientists discovered that there is fire and liquid fire in the center of the earth.

You may be thinking, “I don't want to hear about such misery. I want to be cheered up. Well, the good news is that you don't have to go there! That's if you change masters, repent of your sins, and ask Christ to come into your heart and help you to *“...leave your life of sin”* (John 8:11 NIV). This is why we celebrate Christmas each year. Jesus already took your punishment for you, but you can't claim salvation unless you come to Him on God's terms, as stated above.



Who do you love more than anyone else in the world? How much do they love you? Would they leave a life of joy and contentment to come into this world and be spit upon and beaten (Mark 14:65), whipped severely (John 19:1), mocked, crowned with thorns (see John 19:2-3), and crucified out of love for you? Jesus did! God the Father knew what His beloved Son would suffer in your place. But He loved you enough to ask His only Son to do it. And Jesus loved you enough to acquiesce! No gift you've ever received is more valuable than that!

If you have already accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior, consider this. *“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ...”* (1 Peter 1:18-19 NIV). *“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him!”* (Romans 5:6-9 NIV). Therefore, don't let the circumstances of your life get you down in the dumps. If you love God, you have got a better home waiting for you in Heaven *“...where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”* (Matthew 6:19-21 NIV).

The network news at night is depressing. That's because Satan loves to brag about all the misery he has caused. *“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms”* (Ephesians 6:12 NIV). If you love Christ, you've got a lot to look forward to. So, don't think about all the problems that exist. God is still on the throne in Heaven, and Jesus will be coming back soon to reclaim this world (see Revelation 19:11-21). And God will make all things new. The apostle, John, saw the end of this world, and God wins! John said, *“...He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new...”* (Revelation 21:5 KJV). *“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you”* (Philippians 4:8-9 KJV).

Have a wonderful Christmas, everyone! And remember God loves you. And He is much stronger and more powerful than anything evil could ever dream up! With Christ, we win in the end!

In the service of our Savior and Lord, *Eric and Anne Kaestner*

# God's Strategy with His Flock

By Anne Kaestner

One benefit of maturing in Christ is learning so much more about the way God works with us. It's so important because our enemy, the devil, does everything he can to discourage our Christian faith. So, the less you understand God's ways of doing things, the easier it is for Satan and his demons to lie to you about the Lord's motives. It's because we all live in a carnal world that is currently being run by God's enemy, "...the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2 KJV). He is also known as "...that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him" (Revelation 12:9 KJV). Satan was cast out of Heaven after he tried a failed mutiny against God (Revelation 12:7-8). However, he was stripped of his power and prestige that God had formerly given to him. Even his body was destroyed by God (see Ezekiel 28:18), along with that of his angels, who are known as demons.

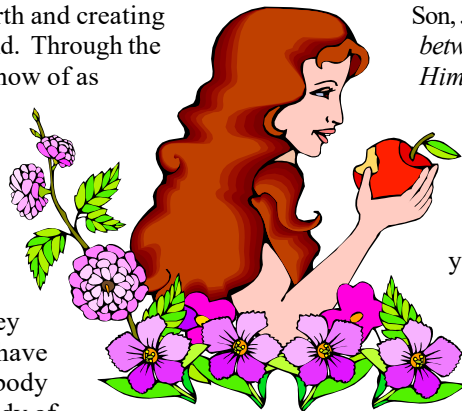
We don't know how much time went by after Satan's fall from Heaven. However, sometime after that, the Lord made plans for a new creation. "Then God said, 'Let us make man in Our image, in Our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created man in His Own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:26-27 NIV). God the Father and God the Son were thrilled with the idea of remaking the earth and creating God's newest and most prized creation, mankind. Through the writings of Solomon, God's Son (whom we know of as Jesus Christ) spoke of the joy God the Father and God the Son had remaking the earth for us. He said, "Then I was the craftsman at His side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in His presence, rejoicing in His whole world and delighting in mankind" (Proverbs 8:30-31 NIV). But Satan and his demons were still on the earth, where they had been thrown. And because they did not have solid bodies, they were able to enter into the body of an animal. They could not enter into the body of Adam or Eve, because Adam and Eve were not in Satan's control. They were perfect. And Adam controlled the earth that God had given to him.

Satan saw how beautiful this planet was once God remade it out of the dark, chemical mess it had become (see Genesis 1:2-10). So, he conceived a plan to gain control of this world away from Adam. Satan knew that Adam was wise to him. So, he couldn't deceive him directly. "...Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner" (1 Timothy 2:14 NIV). Satan also knew how much Adam loved Eve. So, Adam made the biggest blunder any human has ever made. He gave it all up, and doomed all those who would be born from his seed to Hell. Most of us have heard the story about how Satan entered into the body of a snake and tempted Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. You see, Adam knew that if he stayed true to God, he would be separated from Eve due to her sin. So, Adam was willing to go wherever Eve went, even if it meant he would lose control over this world system, Satan would gain it, and Adam would end up in Hell. Some ministers preach that Adam and Eve were saved because God sacrificed two animals for them and covered their naked bodies with animal skins (Genesis 3:21). However, I believe that was a metaphoric expression to symbolize the fact that only the blood sacrifice of Christ can cover-up sin. I see no honest contrition on Adam and Eve's part (Psalm 51:17), only excuses (Genesis 3:12-13) and regret over their punishment.

So next time Satan tries to whisper in your ear that your problems are all God's fault, don't be deceived. The devil is the one who is causing them, not God. God loves you. The devil hates you. Keep that in mind and you will not be deceived the way Eve was. As Paul, the apostle, told the Corinthians, "...I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough" (2 Corinthians 11:3-4 NIV). God loves us and wants the best for us. However, the world we currently live in is very temporary. When God breathed into the body of Adam (see Genesis 2:7), He made him, Eve, and all who would come from Adam's seed, eternal beings who would never cease to exist somewhere. When your human soul or spirit leaves its body, your human body dies and decays. However, your personality does not die. Then you go to your permanent home in either Heaven or Hell. There is no such thing as purgatory. It was invention of the Catholic church in order to raise money. The word purgatory does not even appear in the Bible. There are only two destinations to which we can go, Heaven or Hell. And it's not based on how good or bad you've been.

It is based on your relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ. "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time" (1 Timothy 2:5-6 NIV). It depends on whether you have ever repented of your sin and asked God for His forgiveness. And then, only, if you remain faithful to Christ and you allow His Holy Spirit to guide your heart (Galatians 5:24-26).

That's why God's Son, who came into this world as Jesus Christ, said, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it" (Matthew 7:13-14 NIV). It's why God makes His decisions about your life with one thought in mind. That's how it will affect you and others around you eternally. Jesus gave an example of that in His story about the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). The rich man died and went to Hell, but the beggar went to Paradise. That's because the righteous could not enter Heaven back then. For Jesus had not paid for their sins yet. So, they went to a place of refreshment, called Paradise. It was next to Hell. And, as Abraham said to the rich man in the Lord's anecdote, "...between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us" (Luke 16:26 NIV). The rich man was worried about his brothers and didn't want them to go where he was. It was so miserable a place that he was in agony. But he could see Lazarus, the beggar he knew, in a better place. The rich man begged Abraham to send Lazarus over to him with a bit of water to cool his tongue in the fire. The rich man still thought he was a big shot. And he still considered Lazarus as no one of importance because that's what Lazarus was considered in his earthly life. However, to God, Lazarus was worthy of salvation for his faith. He remained faithful to God until his death. The rich man never considered anything important but wealth and pleasure. And I have heard that Bible scholars have said that the original Greek gives the impression that the rich man was a Jewish religious leader. Yet his religion didn't give him



salvation. Unlike Lazarus, his heart was not right with God.

I also find it interesting that in the New Testament, not many wealthy religious leaders were used by God. The only two rich men that I have found that became righteous were Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus (John 19:38-39, 3:1-13). God chose a shepherd boy, like David, a tax collector, like Mathew, and fishermen like Peter and John to change the world. As Paul told the Corinthians, “*Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him*” (1 Corinthians 1:26-29 NIV). In other words, God uses those that the world considers unimportant because He gets greater glory that way. People will say, “Where did he get this wisdom, eloquence, and spiritual power from? He’s not rich or educated. He’s nothing special. It must be God doing it!” Moses and Paul, who both started out rich and highly educated, lost it all for the Lord’s sake. “*By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward*” (Hebrews 11:24-26 NIV).

Paul also came from a rich family. He was trained as a Pharisee (see Philippians 3:5). However, Paul said, “*...whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith*” (Philippians 3:7-9 NIV). So, what is eternal is really what is most valuable. And that only works if you stay true to Christ. No matter what happens in this world, peace with God and faith that the Lord will guide you through all your problems, is what really matters. Life in this realm is really short. When you are young, you don’t even think much about getting old. But when you get past forty, the years go by very fast. Even young people can die without warning. So, to the wise, knowing that you will stay out of Hell and spend eternity in Heaven, when you leave this world, brings serenity (Philippians 4:7).

With all Job suffered, in the midst of his bitter trial, he kept his faith in God despite his current circumstances. He said, “*I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see Him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!*” (Job 19:25-27 NIV). It is our faith in Christ that Satan tries to destroy. Because that is what we must cling to, as a branch clings to the vine (John 15:2-8). Satan and his demon helpers want to destroy us all because God loves us. That’s why the way of the world is hectic, rushed, and stressful. As Jesus put it, “*...A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still*

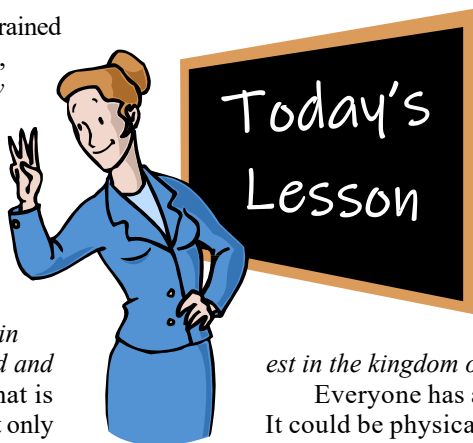
*other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown*” (Matthew 13:3-8 NIV).

It means that many hear the message of salvation, and are initially enthusiastic about it. They originally accept it. However, the demons distract them from Christ. Jesus explained the meaning of the parable. “*When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. [False prophets give a wrong interpretation.] The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. [His faith is not strong enough because his heart is too hard to let go of his own control and trust God.] The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown*” (Matthew 13:19-23 NIV). The person who received the seed that fell in good ground lets the Holy Spirit guide him and, by his good example, he leads others to Christ.

A spiritual lesson I learned during a very difficult time in my life was to stop trying to control my own life, and let the Holy Spirit do it. False prophets will promote greed though doctrines like “The Prosperity Gospel” or “Name It and Claim It,” which in the latter case, is very dangerous because it borders on the occult. So, it focuses on you getting all the carnal things in life that you want, instead of searching for God’s will (see 1 John 2:15-17). Jesus said, “*...I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 18:3-4 NIV).

Everyone has a problem of some kind in their life right now. It could be physical, family, financial, work related, or any other number of things. The difference between a true Christian who lives by faith and a lukewarm, or nominal believer is this. The true Christian has a foundation to stand on that is built on the solid rock of Christ. The lukewarm, or nominal Christian’s faith is built on sand (Matthew 7:24-27). When trouble strikes and all seems lost, the true Christian has a knowledge that God must have some kind of plan in mind. One of my favorite quotes is “for every ending, there’s a new beginning.” And the Lord has a habit of telling us about something good that He will do for us, then making years or decades go by without it happening. In fact, the situation only gets worse until it seems impossible for the prophecy to come true. It is a way of testing our faith. Joseph was told in a dream that the sun, moon, and eleven stars would bow down before him. Even Jacob, his father, scolded him for telling his family about the dream. He knew what the dream meant. “*...his father rebuked him and said, ‘What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?’*” (Genesis 37:10 NIV). Actually, Jacob meant his step mother, Leah. For, by then, Joseph’s mother, Rachel, was dead.

Most of us know the story. Joseph was despised by his eleven brothers, who beat him up and sold him into slavery. The slave traders “*...bruised his feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons, till what he foretold came to pass, till the word of the LORD proved him true. The king sent and released him, the ruler of peoples set him free*” (Psalms 105:18-20 NIV). It was all **(Continued On Page 4)**



## God's Strategy with His Flock (Continued From Page 3)

God's plan to save his people, Israel, from starvation. For the prophecy in the dream finally came true. *"His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. 'We are your slaves,' they said. But Joseph said to them, 'Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.' And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them"* (Genesis 50:18-21 NIV).

It was the same type of situation with a shepherd boy named David. When the prophet, Samuel, was told by God to anoint one of Jesse's sons to be the next king of Israel, Jesse assembled all of his sons except David. So, Samuel *"...asked Jesse, 'Are these all the sons you have?'"* *"There is still the youngest,"* Jesse answered, *"but he is tending the sheep."* Samuel said, *"Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives."* So he sent and had him brought in. He was ruddy, with a fine appearance and handsome features. Then the LORD said, *"Rise and anoint him; he is the one."* So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in power...

(1 Samuel 16:11-13 NIV). However, King Saul was still alive. So, after that, David was welcome in Saul's palace for seven years. He married Saul's daughter, and sang to Saul when Saul was tormented by a demon (1 Samuel 16:16-23), and fought battles for Israel (see 1 Samuel 17:4-52). But after a while, Saul didn't like the idea of David replacing him. So, David was in fear for his life because Saul wanted to kill him. So, David spent the next four years living in caves, trying to stay alive. That's when David wrote a lot of psalms. Yet eventually, Saul died and David did become king (2 Samuel 5:4). David had to be tested first, to see if he would trust God and live by faith (Hebrews 11:6).

Naomi is another example of the way the Lord works. Naomi's husband's name was Elimelech. They had two sons, named Mahlon and Kilion. Originally, they were from Bethlehem, Judah. However, due to a famine in the country, they went to live in the land of Moab. After a while, *"...Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband. When she heard in Moab that the LORD had come to the aid of His people by providing food for them, Naomi and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there"* (Ruth 1:3-6 NIV). Now, I imagine, it must have been a depressing situation. All three women were widows. It was probably dangerous too, three women traveling alone, in the Middle East, those days. When Naomi's daughter-in-law, Ruth, married a Hebrew, Ruth turned her back on her past and accepted the God of the Hebrews as her own.

Ruth never had any children, and now, suddenly, life had taken a difficult turn for her. She was left with no husband, no offspring, and seemingly no way of making a living. Her sister-in-law, Orpah, had found herself in the same situation. What's interesting about this account is that it reminds me so much of many church women today. There are some, who are like Naomi and Orpah, who are ready to give up hope, and just try to survive. Then there are others, like Ruth. Naomi had been born into a godly family, but she took her relationship with God for granted. In fact, the only reason why she

was returning to Judah was due to the fact that she had become widowed, hungry, and she had heard that God had blessed His people in Judah with food (see Ruth 1:6-7).

Sadly, her relationship with God was so shallow that she really didn't value it. She undoubtedly cared far more about her two daughters-in-law, and wanted, what she considered, the best for them. But her criteria for happiness didn't depend on her relationship with God. It depended on home and family. They were everything to Naomi. Therefore, she felt that she had lost it all. That's why she used her own standards of happiness when recommending that her daughters-in-law go back where they came from, to the idol worshippers of Moab. Orpah agreed with Naomi that going back would be the best thing. She sadly kissed her mother-in-law goodbye and returned to her past, but Ruth flatly refused to go back. She had experienced just a little bit of the God of the Hebrews and wanted so much more. Unlike Naomi and Orpah, Ruth didn't value that which was of human invention, but that which was of God! The future clearly held no promise of remarriage for Ruth. There was no guarantee that she'd ever find another husband. In fact, her chance of doing so seemed to be better if she returned to the Moabites. Nevertheless, Ruth would not leave Naomi. Even though Naomi was in a back-slidden state, she was the only tangible link Ruth had to the God of the Hebrews. So, Ruth would not give Him up no matter what! It didn't matter if she went hungry for a while. She didn't

worry that she may never get married again. Motherhood, home, and family seemed insignificant in comparison to Ruth's thirst for the one and only true God.

*"And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if I ought but death part thee and me. When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her. So they two went until they came to Bethlehem..."* (Ruth 1:16-19 KJV). I don't believe it was any coincidence that Ruth and Naomi ended up in a little town named Bethlehem, for

little did they know at the time that in this seemingly unimportant town, there would eventually be born the

only hope and salvation for mankind, Jesus Christ! As it turned out, there is no more mention in the Bible of what happened to Orpah, but Ruth was greatly blessed of God. For she had put Him first and foremost in her life. She married a wealthy Hebrew named Boaz. *"So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bare a son... and they called his name Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of David"* (Ruth 4:13 and 17 KJV). David eventually became king of all Israel, and a direct ancestor of Jesus Christ (see Matthew 1:5-16)!

True Christian victory doesn't depend on the circumstances of your life, or the blessings or curse you think you are receiving. Naomi thought her life was over because the men in her family were dead. Little did she know of the joy that God would give her, not through her son, but through her daughter-in-law, Ruth. For Ruth chose to set a course for Bethlehem, a land she had never been to, and knew very little about, but a city that would play a pivotal role through the annals of time. Due to her love and commitment to a God her birth family never knew, Ruth was looking *"...for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God"* (Hebrews 11:10 KJV).

