IT'S NOT A NICE BOOK

Posted on March 14, 2014 by Eddie

The Bible a book which was written by people who lived under foreign occupation, who knew the realities of war, who suffered famine and who, all too often, met untimely deaths. Because of this, the Bible speaks to people who know these situations today; it is a realistic book, a painful book, but not a nice book.
Category: Bible & Mission

If you think the Bible is full of encouragement, joyous events and all round sweetness and light, can I suggest that you are not reading it very carefully.

Just think about the book of Ruth for a moment. It is often portrayed as a sort of Biblical RomCom (well, perhaps not so much Com, but a lot of Rom). A foreign girl settles with her mother in law in the land of Israel, she works hard, meets a nice man whom (against the odds) she marries and, wonder of wonder, she becomes King David's great-grandmother. Yes, but...

This is how the book of Ruth starts

> *In the days when the judges ruled in Israel, a severe famine came upon the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah left his home and went to live in the country of Moab, taking his wife and two sons with him. Â The manâ€™s name was Elimelech, and his wife was Naomi. Their two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in the land of Judah. And when they reached Moab, they settled there.*
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> *Then Elimelech died, and Naomi was left with her two sons. The two sons married Moabite women. One married a woman named Orpah, and the other a woman named Ruth. But about ten years later, both Mahlon and Kilion died. This left Naomi alone, without her two sons or her husband.*

There was a famine that was so severe, that a family were driven from their home to a foreign country. Elimelech was almost certainly a peasant farmer and he would only have forsaken his fields and possessions if things were truly hopeless. We've all seen footage of refugees in famine struck lands; this isn't the stuff of a nice romantic comedy. Despite everything, they made it to Moab and even settled down to make some sort of a living, but within ten years, three of the four refugees had died. That's three quarters of them; just pause and take this in. Naomi and her daughters-in-law were left with nothing and no way to keep body and soul together, so Naomi decided to go back to her homeland; a refugee in reverse.

Yes, the story works out well, but it is a story soaked in pain and suffering. Even the nice sounding bits about 'gleaning in the fields' are really all about hard, back-breaking work.

The thing is, the Bible was written out of situations like this one. It's a book which was written by people who lived under foreign occupation, who knew the realities of war, who suffered famine and who, all too often, met untimely deaths. Because of this, the Bible speaks to people who know these situations today; it is a realistic book, a painful book, but not a nice book.

In our nice comfortable Western world, we like to sanitise the Bible; to do away with the difficult bits, but we do it an injustice if we do. The Bible was written by people who lived hard lives in tough situations, it reflects their experience and speaks to people who face the same issues. This is why

the Bible continues to be so respected and sought after around the world.