

Ruth – Part 1
January 15, 2023
A Tale of Three Widows
Ruth 1

I. Introduction to the Book of Ruth

- A. Sandwiched between the Book of Judges and the Book of 1 Samuel is the Book of Ruth, which was likely recorded by Samuel around 1100-1000 BC.
- B. Two Biblical books named for women – Ruth & Esther – both being stories of deliverance with interesting similarities.
 - 1. Ruth is a beautiful story that shows us how God uses ordinary people as part of His plan to deliver a nation & the world from sin.
 - 2. Esther is also a beautiful story of deliverance, where God had Esther in just the right place at just the right time to do just the right work.
 - 3. Ruth is about a Gentile woman who marries a prominent Jewish man named Boaz.
- 4. Esther is about a Jewish woman who marries a prominent Gentile man - - King Ahasuerus (Persian name) or Artaxerxes the Great (Greek name).
- C. Only book in the Bible named after an ancestor of the Lord Jesus Christ
- D. Only book in the Old Testament named after a non-Jewish person
- E. Ruth contains 85 verses and at least three main themes
 - 1. **Providence** - - how God sovereignly takes events in our lives and weaves them together for our good and His glory. Providence means that the hand of God is in the glove of human events.
 - 2. **Conversion** - - We have a Gentile girl (Ruth) who becomes a convert to the God of the Covenant of Israel and cuts all ties with the past.
 - 3. **Redemption** –We will see in the Book of Ruth where a man from Bethlehem redeems a Gentile bride, bringing her to himself in an incredible foreshadowing of Jesus, our ultimate Redeemer.

Redeem – to deliver another from difficulty, danger, or bondage, usually by the payment of a ransom price.

St. Augustine said, “**The new is in the Old contained and the old is in the New explained.**” We will see seeds of the New Testament truths of redemption contained in this little Old Testament story.

II. Elimelech and Naomi leave Bethlehem for Moab (Ruth 1:1-2)

¹Now it came about in the days when the judges governed, that there was a famine in the land. And a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the land of Moab with his wife and his two sons.

A. The setting was Bethlehem during those dark days when judges were ruling in Israel.

1. Read Judges 21:25

“In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”

2. There was apostasy - - Israel was falling away from allegiance to the living God.

3. Israel was under attack and constantly at war with various peoples who wanted that piece of territory - - that land bridge between Egypt and Mesopotamia called Israel. They were being oppressed by enemies on all sides at various times, and God was allowing it in order to get their attention.

4. Israel perpetuated the “sin cycle” as 15 judges presided during this 350-year period

- a. Rebellion
- b. Retribution
- c. Repentance
- d. Restoration
- e. Rest

5. There’s a principle that we need to remember here: **The more you do as you please, the less you are pleased with what you do.**

6. Description of the time of the Judges from “The Message” - -

2 Chronicles 15:3-6:

For a long time, Israel didn’t have the real God, nor did they have the help of priest or teacher or book. But when they were in trouble and got serious and decided to seek God, the God of Israel, God let Himself be found. At that time, it was a dog-eat-dog world. Life was constantly up for grabs. No one, regardless of country knew what the next day might bring. Nation battered nation. City pummeled city. And God let loose every kind of trouble among them.”

B. There was a famine in the land, **LIKELY THE JUDGMENT OF GOD**, so this family, **chose** to leave Israel and go to sojourn in Moab.

1. Bethlehem means “**house of bread**.”
2. Look at Deuteronomy 28 at what God (through His servant Moses) said to the new generation of Israelites about to enter the Promised Land:
 - a. The Lord will bless you if you diligently obey Him (Deut. 28:1-14) - - **14 verses of blessings that would follow obedience.**

Verse 12 – “The Lord will open for you His good storehouse; the heavens, to give rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hand; and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow.”

- b. There are consequences if you disobey Him (Deut. 28:15-68)
- - **54 verses that describe the curses that would fall upon the people if they forsook the Lord.**

Verse 24 – “The Lord will make the rain of your land powder and dust; from heaven it shall come down on you until you are destroyed.”

What God is telling them in this chapter is that the productivity of the land will be directly proportional to their obedience.

Read Verse 2:

² **The name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife, Naomi; and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah. So they entered the land of Moab and remained there.**

C. As we go through this story, look at all the poor choices they made.

1. Elimelech – “my God is king”
2. Naomi – “pleasant”
3. Mahlon – “sick” or “sickly” or “weakling”
4. Chilion – “pining” or “crying” or “crybaby”

Bethlehem was at 2500’ above sea level. On a clear day, Elimelech could look to the east, out across the Dead Sea (at 1300’ below sea level) some

40 miles and see the highlands, the green rolling hills of Moab - - up to 3200' in elevation & 16" of rainfall per year - - porous soil.

Elimelech was probably growing frustrated in dealing with parched ground, dying sheep, failing crops, and the growing scarcity of water in Israel - - AND he made a choice to take his family to Moab.

1. A little background on Moab - - things we need to know
 - a. Perennial enemy of Israel
 - b. It was under a curse of God – Deuteronomy 23:3
“No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the Lord; none of their descendants, even to the tenth generation, shall ever enter the assembly of the Lord because they did not meet you with food and water on the way when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you,”
 - c. Originated through the incestuous union of Lot and his oldest daughter (Genesis 19:37)
 - d. They worshipped the god Chemosh and believed in child sacrifices.
 - e. God commanded the Israelites not to marry these pagans, because intermarriage would lead the Israelites to worship false gods.
 - f. In Psalm 108-8-9, God said, **“Judah is my lawgiver, my scepter, but Moab, you are my washbowl.”**

POOR CHOICE NO. 1:

Elimelech (“my God is King”) and his family (“Pleasant,” “Sickly,” and “Crybaby”) left “the house of bread” and the house of praise - - and went over to eat out of the garbage can or the “washbowl,” in the land of Moab.

Verse 1 tells us that they **“went to sojourn in the land of Moab.”** They probably planned to stay there till the famine in Israel was over, then return.

POOR CHOICE NO. 2:

In Verse 2 we see that they **“remained there.”** They got a little too comfortable living out of God’s will - - and that’s what sin does in our lives. They made the choice to live there.

Read Verses 3-4:

³ Then Elimelech, Naomi’s husband, died; and she was left with her two sons. ⁴ And they took for themselves Moabite women as wives; the name of the

one was Orpah, and the name of the other, Ruth. And they lived there about ten years.

III. Loss in Moab and Naomi's decision to return to Bethlehem (Ruth 1:3-13)

- A. Elimelech died & the two sons took Moabite wives
 - 1. This family's history of poor choices continues
 - 2. **POOR CHOICE NO. 3:** Naomi made the decision to remain in Moab
 - 3. **POOR CHOICE NOS. 4 & 5:** Her two sons chose to marry non-Covenant, Non-Jewish women - - Moabites.
 - a. Mahlon married Ruth (Ruth 4:9) – **Ruth means “companion” or “friend” or “compassionate friendship.”**
 - b. Chilion married Orpah – **Orpah means “deer” or “fawn.”**

- B. After 10 years in Moab, Mahlon and Chilion died (vv. 4-5)

Verse 5:

⁵ Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died, and the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

There's so much heartache packed into Verses 3-5 - - Naomi loses her husband and both sons. God has not been mentioned in the first 5 verses, but perhaps Naomi's "God Consciousness" is returning - - let's move on to Verse 6.

Verse 6:

⁶ Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the land of Moab, for she had heard in the land of Moab that the LORD had visited His people in giving them food.

The name of the LORD is the Covenant name that is used - - Yahweh, the God of the Jews, the God of the Covenant - The Great "I AM."

- C. Naomi says, "**Yahweh** has visited His people in giving them food." She attributes it to God.
- D. As we all know, sorrow and pain can awaken a person's need for God like nothing else.
- E. The famine in Israel was over and Naomi made another choice - - a GOOD CHOICE this time - - that being to return to Bethlehem.

Verse 7:

⁷ So she departed from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah

- F. She is giving us a beautiful picture of repentance - - she is making a complete turnaround in her life - - she is heading out of and away from the rebellion associated with their poor choice to go to Moab.
- G. 2 Corinthians 7:10 - - **Godly** sorrow works repentance. We may be 100 steps away from God, but it's only 1 step back to Him.

Verses 8-9

⁸ And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me. ⁹ May the LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband." Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.

- H. She instructs her daughters-in-law to remain, and she asked the Lord to bless them, but they voice their desires to return to Israel with her.

Verse 10:

¹⁰ And they said to her, "No, but we will surely return with you to your people."

- I. Naomi pleaded with them to return to Moab in the next 3 verses.

Verses 11-13:

¹¹ But Naomi said, "Return, my daughters. Why should you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? ¹² Return, my daughters! Go, for I am too old to have a husband. If I said I have hope, if I should even have a husband tonight and also bear sons,

{Remember the Law of Levirate Marriage according to Deuteronomy 25:5-10 was that a living brother would raise up seed for the dead brother - - we'll talk more about that next week}.

¹³ would you therefore wait until they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters; for it is harder for me than for you, for the hand of the LORD has gone forth against me."

There are several reasons why she was so firm in her pleading with them to return to Moab

1. Just being a widow was hard enough for them but being a widow in a foreign land would surely be difficult.
2. Naomi knew the prejudice of her people toward a cursed society, especially the Moabites. It would surely be a difficult, challenging life in many ways. How well would her people accept them, she must have wondered.
3. Then, she said, “Hey, even if I could have kids right now, you’re going to rob the cradle and, you know, wait 20 years until they grow up.

Naomi basically told them that, “If you’re going to return to Bethlehem with me, you’re going to have to count the cost. You will be “foreigners” and you will have to accept poverty, ostracism, and perpetual widowhood.”

IV. Naomi and Ruth return to Israel (Ruth 1:14-22)

Verses 14-15:

¹⁴ And they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

¹⁵ Then she said, “Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law.”

A. Here in **Verses 16-17** we have Ruth’s hallmark expression of loyalty to Naomi and to God.

- a. **“Where you go, I will go”** - - “I made a decision to go with you, and I’m going with you. I’m not using this just as a passport to get into The Land of Promise.”
- b. **“And where you lodge, I will lodge,”** She would not only go with Naomi, but she’ll also identify herself with her. “I accept your poverty,” She bears the same name now, as she had married her son, and she will stick right with Naomi.
- c. **“Your people shall be my people”** - - “I am forsaking my people, idolators, and I’m identifying myself with God’s people.”
- d. **“Your God will be my God”** - - She had met and married into a family who knew the living and true God, and she had come to know Him. Ruth was turning her back on everything she had been raised to believe in. She was casting that away and embracing something new.

This was where she came into relationship with God - - where she was converted.

- e. **“Where you die, I will I die”** - - “The hope of Israel is MY hope.”
- f. **“And there will I be buried”** - - her hope now resided in Israel’s hope and not Moab’s,
- g. **“May the Lord do so to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me.”** - - “I’m not making this decision for just a day or two, but for time and for eternity,”

Naomi – a grieving widow.

Orpah – a leaving widow.

Ruth – a cleaving widow.

And here in Verse 18:

¹⁸ When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

B. Arrival in Israel (vv. 19-22)

Verses 19-22:

¹⁹ So they both went until they came to Bethlehem. And when they had come to Bethlehem, all the city was stirred because of them, and the women said, “Is this Naomi?” ²⁰ She said to them, “Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. ²¹ I went out full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?”

²² So Naomi returned, and with her Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, who returned from the land of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

1. Their trip of 40 miles likely took 7-10 days, descending about 3200’ from Moab into the Jordan Valley, then ascending 2500’ through the hills of Judea.
2. The town of Bethlehem was abuzz when they arrived.
3. Naomi told them to call her “Mara,” meaning bitter, because she went out full and returned empty - - she had lost her husband and two sons, and she probably sold everything she had & returned with only the clothing she was wearing.

4. Her experiences were not unlike Job's - her perspective (at this particular point in the story) resembled Job's wife's.
5. In reality, Naomi had:
 - a. A full harvest prospect (note that they arrived at the beginning of the barley harvest).
 - b. Ruth, who would soon meet Boaz.
 - c. The hope of God's future blessings.

V. Takeaways from Ruth 1

- A. Providence is how God sovereignly takes events in our lives and weaves them together for our good and His glory.
- B. Even in the worst of times, God is in control, and He is at work. It is important that we spend time with Him, allowing Him to lead us through the rough waters of life.
- C. Choices we make can affect us for a lifetime. God's people do best when we involve Him in our decisions.
- D. The more we do as we please, the less pleased we are with what we do.
- E. Godly sorrow works repentance. We may be 100 steps away from God, but it's only 1 step back to Him
- F. Repentance is a decisive change in direction; a whole-hearted turning to God. It is a commitment to a renewed relationship with God. It is a complete turning in the heart and will followed by actions.