

December 3, 2023

“The Faith of Ruth”
Lesson 1

Ruth 1:6-18, 22

Intro

The book of Ruth takes place during the time of the judges. During this time, Israel had challenging relations with many neighboring nations, including Moab. Because the Moabites descended from Abraham’s nephew Lot, marriage to a Moabite was not banned specifically, though the Moabites were not allowed to enter the assembly of the Lord.

A famine hits Israel, so a woman named Naomi and her family resettle in Moab. During the next 10 years, Naomi’s two sons marry Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah. Then her husband dies, and her two sons die.

Being a widow was very precarious. Men at this time had far more economic power than women. If a woman had no male relative to care for her, she would be reduced to poverty quickly. Fathers and sons were the best line of defense to protect widows. In the case of younger widows, this protection only need last until a new husband could be found.

Our text today picks up just after the sons have died, and the three women are figuring out what to do.

Read Ruth 1:6-18, 22

1. vs. 6: Naomi hears that the famine is over in Israel and prepares to return

The text says that the daughters-in-law are planning to return with her
Naomi can expect family in Israel to care for her

The famine is over, so helping her won’t be an increased burden on them
Caring for the daughters-in-law will be unexpected for her family

2. vs. 7: When Naomi leaves for Israel, her two daughters-in-law go along with her

The idea that family will care for their own would seem to apply to them as well
Their Moabite families could be expected to care for them as widows

Following Naomi shows there is great love and devotion for her from her daughters-in-law
They forego an immediate chance of remarriage and future family
It could also be that they are too grief-stricken to have considered the long-term impact

3. vs. 8-9a: Naomi tells the women to return to their mother’s homes

Telling them to go there has several possible meanings

It could be the emphasis is on that relationship rather than on future marriage
It could suggest that their fathers have more than one wife—go to your mother
It certainly suggests that the mother and father have separate dwelling places

Naomi’s words imply that she is giving up the mother role she has had with them

Because of that, they aren’t obligated to share the burdens she is now facing

Her words also pronounce a blessing from God on them for their kindness to her

She is sure that God will care for them as they have cared for Naomi

This is the best (only?) gift she feels she can give to them—to let them find new husbands

Her final act is to give them a mother’s kiss goodbye as they part

4. vs. 9b-10: The daughters-in-law weep, a clear sign they do not want to part from Naomi
They declare their desire to continue with Naomi to Israel
It may not have been in their best interests to do this
This indicates how greatly they desire to stay with Naomi
5. vs. 11: Naomi tells them to go home when the women say they want to stay with her
She knows she will not be bearing any more sons for them to marry
If she did, this would have protected all three of the widows in the future
Future sons would have also kept the family line alive into the future
This is not a possibility from Naomi's perspective here
Note that she calls them "daughters" here, not "daughters-in-law"
There is affection for them from Naomi as well
6. vs. 12-13a: Naomi reminds her "daughters" of two truths here
First, she will not be having more children
Even if she was able to, it would be 20ish years before they could marry
The two women would be in their 40's by then; staying with Naomi is unrealistic
Second, she reminds them their best option is to "return home"
Their Moabite families will be motivated to find them new husbands
Also, Naomi's situation will be better for herself without two other dependents
7. vs. 13b: Naomi's final word to the two daughters is a lament about her situation
"It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord's hand has turned against me!"
God's hand can imply His direction or His correction
Naomi speaks of God's hand as correcting her, of making her life bitter
In 1:20, she tells the women in Israel to call her Mara ("Bitter")
She certainly feels here that her life has been made bitter by her circumstances
She has lost her husband and her two sons
She has no one in her life to care for her in her old age
She has two widowed daughters-in-law that won't let her go
8. vs. 14: The two women both weep at this pronouncement
They feel bad for Naomi, and they feel sad that they are asked to leave her
Orpah leaves, which helps Naomi and is in keeping with the wisdom of the time
But Ruth "clung" to Naomi
She refuses to go back to her mother's home
9. vs. 15: This is the third time that Naomi has tried to get Ruth to leave
She even points out that Orpah has left
Ruth should go back to her people as well
10. vs. 16-17a: In vs. 16, Ruth again emphatically rejects Naomi's call for her to leave
Instead, she makes a vow of her intention to stay with Naomi always
She chooses what she has come to know over what she knew before
Her people worshipped Chemosh and did evil things
Ruth will worship the Lord with Naomi and live by His ways

Ruth state her intention to “die where you die” to Naomi, and to be buried there
She is devoting herself to Naomi as a true daughter
Whatever comes Naomi’s way, Ruth will accept as her lot in life also

11.vs. 17b-18: Ruth here finishes with a strong vow that shows how serious she is
She asks that God “deal...severely” with her if she ever left Naomi
She understands what she is doing, and will not be turned away from it
Naomi, seeing this, quits trying to get her to leave
Ruth is going to stay with Naomi always

12.vs. 22: The two women arrive back in Bethlehem without apparent trouble
They arrive at the beginning of the barley harvest
This shows that the famine has indeed ended
This harvest hints at better times coming for both these women

Application: We were created to be in community with both God and others. Ruth’s faithfulness to Naomi and to the Lord shows us an example of what living and loving in community might require of us. As Ruth did for Naomi, showing up in the midst of pain and anguish is difficult, especially if we ourselves are feeling our own loss as well. How we respond to tragedy indicates whether we are following God’s call on us to be loving and committed to those in our community.

Prayer: Father God, help us each to demonstrate Your love in our relationships and our communities, so that we can actively bless those people. In Jesus’ name, Amen.