

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes
6-12-24

Ruth 1

A Sojourn In Moab – Verses 1-2

¹ In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. ² The man's name was Elimelek, his wife's name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.

1:1 This account begins in the closing days of the Judges, a 400-year period of general anarchy and oppression when the Israelites were not ruled by kings, but by periodic deliverers whom God raised up when the nation sought Him again. These were dark days for Israel, when “everyone did as they saw fit” (Judges 17:6; 21:25). But during those dark and evil times, there were still some who followed God. Naomi and Ruth are beautiful examples of loyalty, friendship, and commitment— to God and to each other.

1:1-2 Moab was the land east of the Dead Sea. It was one of the nations that oppressed Israel during the period of the judges (Judges 3: 12-31), so there was hostility between the two nations. The famine must have been quite severe in Israel for Elimelek to move his family there. They were called Ephrathites because Ephrath was an earlier name for Bethlehem. Even if Israel had already defeated Moab, there still would have been tensions between them.

Naomi Loses Her Husband and Sons – Verses 3-5

³ Now Elimelek, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. ⁴ They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, ⁵ both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

1:3 Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died: When Elimelech and his family came to Moab, they did not find life easier. Elimelech soon died, and his wife Naomi was left to care for their two boys, Mahlon and Chilion. It is sometimes difficult to discern why tragic things happen. What is certain is that the change of scenery didn't make things better. We sometimes think we can move away from our problems, but find we just bring them with us. No matter where you go, you bring yourself with you — so the same problems can continue in a different place.

1:4-5 Friendly relations with the Moabites were discouraged (Deuteronomy 23:3-6) but probably not forbidden, since the Moabites lived outside the Promised Land. Marrying a Canaanite (and all those living within the borders of the Promised Land), however, was against God's law (Deuteronomy 7:1-4). Moabites were not allowed to worship at the tabernacle because they had not let the Israelites pass through their land during the Exodus from Egypt. As God's chosen nation, Israel should have set the standards of high moral living for the other nations. Ironically it was Ruth, a Moabitess, whom God used as an example of genuine spiritual character. This shows just how bleak life had become in Israel during those days.

1:4-5 Now they took wives of the women of Moab: Mahlon and Chilion grew, and took wives among the Moabite women, named Orpah and Ruth. Again, this was not in obedience to God; God commanded the Israelites to not marry among the pagan nations surrounding them. Both Mahlon and Chilion died: As time went on (about ten years) Naomi's sons died. So now there were three childless widows — Naomi and her two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth.

1:4-5 To be a childless widow was to be among the lowest, most disadvantaged classes in the ancient world. There was no one to support you, and you had to live on the generosity of strangers. Naomi had no family in Moab, and no one else to help her. It was a desperate situation.

Naomi And Ruth Return To Bethlehem – Verses 6-7

6When Naomi heard in Moab that the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. **7**With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.

1:6 She had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had visited His people: From distant Moab, Naomi heard that God was doing good things back in Israel. She wanted to be part of the good things that God was doing. Our life with God should make others want to come back to the LORD just by looking at our life. Our walk with the LORD should be something that makes others say, "I want some of that also!"

1:7 She went out from the place where she was: This set Naomi apart from many other people. Many hear of the good things God is doing in the lives of others, and only wish they could have some of it instead of actually setting out to receive it. Naomi could have stayed in Moab all of her life wishing things were different, but she did something to receive what God had to give her.

Naomi Petitions Her Daughters-In-Law To Go Back To Moab – Verses 8-9

8Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the LORD show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. **9**May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband."

1:8-9 There was almost nothing worse than being a widow in the ancient world. Widows were taken advantage of or ignored. They were almost always poverty stricken. God's law, therefore, provided that the nearest relative of the dead husband should care for the widow; but Naomi had no relatives in Moab, and she did not know if any of her relatives were alive in Israel.

1:8-9 Even in her desperate situation, Naomi had a selfless attitude. Although she had decided to return to Israel, she encouraged Ruth and Orpah to stay in Moab and start their lives over, even though this would mean hardship for her. Like Naomi, we must consider the needs of others and not just our own. As Naomi discovered, when you act selflessly, others are encouraged to follow your example.

Naomi Pleads With Her Daughters-In-Law To Stay In Moab – Verses 10-13

10Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people." **11**But Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? **12**Return

home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons—¹³ would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD’s hand has turned against me!”

1:11 Naomi’s comment here (“Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands?”) refers to levirate marriage, the obligation of a dead man’s brother to care for his widow (Deuteronomy 25:5-10). This law kept the widow from poverty and provided a way for the family name of the dead husband to continue. Naomi, however, had no other sons for Ruth or Orpah to marry, so she encouraged them to remain in their homeland and remarry. Orpah agreed, which was her right. But Ruth was willing to give up the possibility of security and children in order to care for Naomi.

1:13 The hand of the LORD has gone out against me: This obviously weighed heavily on Naomi’s heart and mind. She felt that the calamity which came upon her family came because they were disobedient, probably in leaving the Promised Land of Israel and marrying their sons to Moabite women: Despite this feeling, Naomi is going back to the land of Israel — and going back to her God. Though she felt that the hand of the LORD has gone out against me, she did not grow bitter against God. She returned to Him in repentance, knowing that the answer is drawing closer to Him, not going further from Him.

1:13 What Naomi could not see is that the hand of the LORD would go out for her shortly! There is never reason for us to despair if we believe the hand of the LORD has gone out against me. If we will return to Him, His hand will go out for us again! Naomi had no idea — not the slightest — of how greatly God was going to bless her in a short time.

Orpah Stays In Moab; Ruth Continues On With Naomi – Verse 14

14 At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

1:14 They lifted up their voices and wept again: Both Orpah and Ruth felt deeply; both loved Naomi; both were anxious about the future. But a choice had to be made, and Orpah chose to stay in Moab, while Ruth clung to Naomi. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her: There comes a place in our following after God where it comes down to doing. Ruth and Orpah both felt the same feelings, but Ruth did differently than Orpah.

1:14 Some are content with feeling Christian feelings — with feeling a love for God, with feeling a love for His Word, with feeling a love for His people. But what will you do? We are glad that God didn’t just feel His love for us; instead, For God so loved the world, He gave His only begotten Son. (John 3:16)

Ruth’s Eloquent Statement Of Faith – Verses 15-18

15 “Look,” said Naomi, “your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.” **16** But Ruth replied, “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. **17** 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.” **18** When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

1:16 Ruth was a Moabitess, but that didn't stop her from worshiping the true God, nor did it stop God from accepting her worship and blessing her greatly. The Jews were not the only people God loved. God chose the Jews to be the people through whom the rest of the world would come to know him. This was fulfilled when Jesus Christ was born as a Jew. Through him, the entire world can come to know God. Acts 10:35 says that he "accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right." God accepts all who worship him; he works through people regardless of their race, sex, or nationality. The book of Ruth is a perfect example of God's impartiality. Although Ruth belonged to a race often despised by Israel, she was blessed because of her faithfulness. She became a great-grandmother of King David and a direct ancestor of Jesus. No one should feel disqualified to serve God because of race, sex, or national background. And God can use every circumstance to build his kingdom.

1:16-18 Your God, my God: Ten years of Naomi's compromise in Moab never made Ruth confess her allegiance to the God of Israel. Yet as soon as Naomi stood and said, "I'm going back to the God of Israel, I'll put my fate in His hands" Ruth stood with her. If you think you will persuade your friends or relatives to Jesus by your compromise, you are mistaken. Perhaps you are sincere, but you are mistaken. Only a bold stand for Jesus will really do it.

Naomi and Ruth return to Bethlehem – Verses 19-21

19 So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, "Can this be Naomi?"
20 "Don't call me Naomi," she told them. "Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. **21** I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me."

1:20-21 Naomi had experienced severe hardships. She had left Israel married and secure; she returned widowed and poor. Naomi changed her name to express the bitterness and pain she felt. Naomi was not rejecting God by openly expressing her pain. However, it seems she lost sight of the tremendous resources she had in her relationship with Ruth and with God. When you face bitter times, God welcomes your honest prayers, but be careful not to overlook the love, strength, and resources that he provides in your present relationships. And don't allow bitterness and disappointment to blind you to your opportunities.

So Naomi Returned – Verse 22

22 So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.

1:22 Bethlehem was about five miles southwest of Jerusalem. The town was surrounded by lush fields and olive groves. Its harvests were abundant. Ruth and Naomi's return to Bethlehem was certainly part of God's plan because in this town David would be born (1 Samuel 16:1), and, as predicted by the prophet Micah (Micah 5:2), Jesus Christ would also be born there. This move, then, was more than merely convenient for Ruth and Naomi. It led to the fulfillment of Scripture.

1:22 Because Israel's climate is quite moderate, there are two harvests each year, in the spring and in the fall. The barley harvest took place in the spring, and it was during this time of hope and plenty that Ruth and Naomi returned to Bethlehem. Bethlehem was a farming community, and because it was the time of the harvest, there was plenty of leftover grain in the fields. This grain could be collected, or gleaned, and then made into food.