

COMMITMENT TO A NEW COMMUNITY Sunday School- March 21, 2010

Unifying Topic: FAMILY AS COMMUNITY

Lesson Text

I. Crisis In Life (Ruth 1:1-5)

III. Ruth's Commitment To Naomi (Ruth 1:6-9)

III. Total Commitment To God (Ruth 1:14,16)

The Main Thought: And Ruth said, Entreat 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. (Ruth1:16, KJV).

Unifying Principle: When death changes family bonds, we long to strengthen ties to other relationships. What does it take to strengthen such relationships? Ruth made a loving commitment to her mother-in-law and accepted Naomi's God as her God.

Lesson Aim: A total commitment to God leads to conversion and redemption.

Life aim: No matter how corrupt a circle of friends or a society may be, God will save any person who seeks to be redeemed and delivered from sin and death.

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- 1:1 Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem-Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons.
- 1:2 And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem-Judah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there.
- 1:3 And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons.
- 1: 4 And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years.
- 1: 5 And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband.
- 1:6 Then she arose with her daughters-in-law, that she might return from the country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread.
- 1:7 Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters in law with her; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah.
- 1:8 And Naomi said unto her two daughters in law, Go, return each to her mother's house: the Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me.
- 1: 9 The Lord grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept.
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- 1:14 And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her.
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- 1:16 And Ruth said, Entreat 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:

INTRODUCTION AND HISTORY:

The events take place during the time when the judges ruled in Israel. This was a period in which God's people would move from disobedience to defeat to deliverance. Because everyone did what was right in his or her own eyes, sin was rampant and God's people had hardened hearts. As they fell into idolatry and immorality, God would bring judgment upon them, so that they would repent. Ruth is the bridge from the wickedness of the times of the Judges to the glorious reign of King David.

FAMILY NAMES:

Names, meaning, and how they fit into the picture of the Book.

¹A. ELIMELECH. His name means "*God is my king*". In the days when there was no king in Israel, there was one man, at least, who looked to the God of Heaven to be king of his life. This shows that in every apostasy God has a few who have stood true to their faith in Him, just as Enoch and Elijah during the apostasy of Ahab.

B. NAOMI. Her name means "*my pleasant one*." Truly this is a wonderful name to have. However, because of her life of wandering and backsliding, she renounced the name and requested that she be called "*Mara*,

¹ <http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>

<http://www.pitwm.net//pitwm-sundayschool.html>

meaning "*bitter*." Ten years in the land of Moab brought her home in a bitter condition.

C. MAHLON. This means "*sickly, weak*." The offspring of Elimelech and Naomi were sickly. By inference, we note the spiritual decline of the parents, which is manifested in the names of their children. Usually children reap a portion of what is sown by the father and mother. When there is a decline in spirituality at the head of the home, the effect is soon noticeable in the children. Likewise, when the pastor and official board of a church cease to be spiritual, the result may soon be discerned. In the same way, when the head officers and officials of a church organization no longer have the missionary and evangelistic spirit, and worldliness creeps into their lives, it is soon apparent in other avenues of the church.

D. CHILION. His name means "*consumptive, pining, wasting away, declining*." He is possessed with a germ and a disease that will terminate in death. Again the same spiritual drifting of the parents is being manifested in the second child but in a worse form, showing their spiritual state is rapidly declining as years go on.

POINT:

Throughout the Old Testament the names of the people picture the circumstances surrounding their birth. When the angel announced to Abraham and Sarah that Isaac was to be born, she laughed. When he was born, they named him Isaac, meaning "laughter."

When Joseph was sold by his brethren into Egypt, he went through many hardships and prison experience, which finally led him to the throne. While there he married a Gentile wife, who gave birth to a son. Joseph called his name "Manasseh," which means "He hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house." (Genesis 41:51).

Likewise, around these parent's lives, there no doubt, existed an unrevealed reason for them to name these sons "*sickly*" and "*wasting away*."

E. ORPAH. Married Chilion; Her name means "*a portion of the neck and back; double-minded*" When Naomi left Moab for the land of Bethlehem, she tried to induce her daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, to return to the land of Moab, but they both declared, "*We will return with thee unto thy people*." (1:10). Again she tried to persuade them to return to Moab. "*Orpah kissed her mother-in-law; but Ruth clave unto her*." (v.14). Thus, we see, the meaning of her name was fulfilled in her act when she turned her back on Bethlehem to worship idols in the land of Moab. How many have started like Orpah, but because of persecution, the separation that Christian life demands, or the mocking of some friends, they turned their backs on Bethlehem-Judah to return to their idol worship again.

F. RUTH. Married Mahlon; Her name means "*satisfied*." Ruth was much like the man in the 91st Psalm, who had set his love upon the Lord, (v.14), and because of that fact God said, "*With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation*" (v.16). Many have tried to find satisfaction in different things, but the only lasting satisfaction that is worth while for time and eternity is to be found in Jesus Christ. Yet this satisfaction is not complete, for man still dwells in the realms of sin, still has a decaying body, and still lives in the midst of temptations. Ruth did not find her satisfaction in Moab, in Naomi, or in Bethlehem-Judah, but she found it when she said, "*your people shall be my people, and your God, shall be my God*" v. 16.

The setting of the first part of the Book of Ruth is Bethlehem-Judah. These two words, Bethlehem-Judah, with their meaning the "*house of bread*," later becomes the birthplace of Him Who is the "*Bread of Heaven*," Jesus Christ. Judah, the tribe of which our Savior was a descendant, means "*Praise the Lord*." However, at this time we find in this country of Bethlehem-Judah, where there was supposed to have been bread and worship, there was none, only famine. In the very place where you would look for plenty, there was want. In Palestine, the country in which was Bethlehem-Judah, they did not have rivers as in Egypt upon which to rely for water for their crops. They had to depend entirely on Heaven's mercy to send them rain, and if the Heavens were shut and God failed to give them rain, nothing but shortage, suffering, and death lay before them.

POINT:

It is the same with us in the spiritual life. If we do not have spiritual rain coming from the open heavens, it means a famine for our souls and spiritual death in the future.

LESSON:

Ruth 1:1-5: Crisis In Life

1:1 When Judges Ruled

<http://www.pitwm.net//pitwm-sundayschool.html>

The periods of the judges were some of the most bleakest in Israel's history. ²In the days when the Judges ruled: This account begins in the closing days of the Judges, a four-hundred 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. Notable among the Judges were Gideon, Samson, and Deborah; each of these were raised up by God, not to rule as kings, but to lead Israel during a specific challenge, and not to go back to obscurity. The days when the Judges ruled were actually dark days for Israel; the period was characterized by the phrase everyone did what was right in his own eyes (Judges 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, and 21:25).

At this point in time, the land is stricken with a famine. The first five verses of Ruth form what we have called "*orientation*". They set the scene, presenting the family about whom the story is told and its disastrous history which poses the problem. For, although the central characters are Naomi, Elimelech, Ruth, and Orpah, the story is, in another sense, "about" the family of Elimelech. The problem posed is the lack of descendants for this family, as well as the state of the two women who represent it. They went to "*sojourn*" (stopover, a temporary stay) in the country of Moab until the famine was over.

1:1 Famine

A famine in the land: God specifically promised there would always be plenty in the land if Israel was obedient; a famine in the land means that Israel, as a nation, was not being obedient unto the Lord (Deut.11:13-17).

Famine is finished when we face the Father. Rain is restored when we repent. Pestilence passes away when we pray.

When God sends affliction, it is not for us to run away from, but to turn to God and humble ourselves, pray, seek His face, and turn from our wicked ways. "*Went to sojourn*": It means to leave with the intention to return. Yet the short time Elimelech intended to be gone turned into ten, tragedy-filled years - and Elimelech never returned to Israel. Instead of being part of the solution by repenting, this man sells his property in Bethlehem and takes off. He brings his wife and two sons to Moab to wait out the famine. Whenever we leave God's place and venture into the world, we always tell ourselves that it's only temporary. But rarely is that the case. Once in the world, we find excuse after excuse for staying in it. If you are truly one of God's children, He will arrange it so that you're so miserable, you will come to your senses and return to your heavenly Father. **What a good God we serve!**

In these days, Elimelech, "*God is my king*" from Bethlehem left the land of Israel to sojourn in the pagan country of Moab, because of famine. Bethlehem was a rich agricultural area, in the country of Judah –the home of David and birth place of Jesus (1Sam.16:1, 4; Lk.2:11). Its' name means "*House of Bread*", but times were tough, so he went...

They did not go to Egypt, nor to Babylon, but to Moab. Rather than humbly repent and acknowledge their backslidden condition, many, as Elimelech and Naomi, have gone to Moab. There are three countries to which people living in Canaan have journeyed, Egypt, Babylon, and Moab.*

***1:1 Moab:**

³The Moabites were the descendants of a terrible union. After Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, Lot was afraid to stay in the city of Zoar. So he headed up to the mountains and stayed with his two daughters in a cave. Thinking that this was their only chance to continue the family line, Lot's daughters got him drunk and conceived children with him. "*And the first-born bore a son, and called his name Moab; he is the father of the Moabites to this day*" Gen. 19:37. This is where the Moabites came from.

Later, when the nation of Israel camped next to the land of the Moabites, before entering Canaan, king Balak tried to get Balaam (a magician or soothsayer) to curse Israel. However, he was unable to curse what God had blessed. Num.25:1 "...*the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab*". The women of Moab enticed the Israelites which resulted in God's judgment against Israel.

Under the rule of an overweight Moabite King Eglon, they oppressed the Israelites for 18 years back in Judges 3:14. That oppression ended when the second judge of the Israelites, Ehud, the left-handed Benjamite, killed him. Apparently, the events of the book of Ruth occurred some time after this oppression.

1:1 Steps Downward

Elimelech and Naomi left Bethlehem -- the house of bread -- just to sojourn in the land of Moab. Things like famines would cause people to move from one area to the next in order to survive. Next we see they continued there. The last clause of the fourth verse read "*and they dwelled there about ten years.*" They didn't intend to

² http://www.studylight.org/com/guz/view.cgi?book=ru&chapter=1&verse=1#Ru1_1

³ <http://www.rondaniel.com/library/08-Ruth/Ruth0101.html>

<http://www.pitwm.net//pitwm-sundayschool.html>

stay there. They were like many folks who depart from God to seek an easier way, but finally unite with the cold, dead dwellers of Moab. Some of them leave a spiritual church because they don't like the preacher, because they were unsuccessful in retaining their position on the official board, because their Sunday School Class, which they had taught for a few years, was given to another, or perhaps because of even smaller things. The demotion was too great; and consequently they united with some church less spiritual. They united with Moab.

But there's a second step downward, which I want you to notice; "*they took them wives of the women of Moab*" (v. 4). The very people whom "*God forbade to enter the congregation of the Lord even to the tenth generation,*" (*Deut. 23:3*), were taken as wives for the two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. Instead of remaining as a separate people, they married the very people who had previously tried to curse Israel under the kingship of Balak (Numbers 22). Here's a warning to parents: When you drift from the Lord Jesus Christ and from a spiritual place of worship, there is no telling what the outcome will be to you or your offspring. Unholy alliances have been the downfall of many of God's people. When Solomon took to himself wives of the Moabites, the Ammonites, and the Hittites, he began his departure from the living God (I Kings 11:1).

People often become so entangled by the meshes of the world in a backslidden state that it is very difficult and sometimes even impossible to bring them to the place where they once were. This is a warning for the young people to be sure that they make their choice in marriage according to the will of God. Many young people that were once Spirit-filled workers in God's vineyard, soul-winners in His Kingdom, have married the wrong person, only to settle down to live a wasted life ending in disaster. The only life they have to live ends with want and woe.

1:2 Family Names

The man's name El-ee-MEH-lek, means "God is king"- but was he really living like God was his king? His wife Naomi's name is "*my pleasant one; my delight.*" And I think we learn something about the condition of their sons Makh-LONE and Kil-YONE at birth. Makh-LONE means "sickly," and Kil-YONE means "*consumptive, pining, wasting away, declining.*" They must not have been healthy, strapping boys.

1:3-4 Dad Dies, Sons Marry

A monument is erected with the name, "Elimelech,"(means God is king) inscribed upon it. He, who might have had his burial in the Cave of Machpelah with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, now is buried, perhaps with an idolatrous ceremony, in a strange land.

Remaining in Moab, the two boys married Moabite women: Or-PAW and Ruth. This is not necessarily a good thing. The Moabites were not godly people. There was some bad history between Israel and Moab. The Moabites were worshipers of the god Chemosh, a deity whose worship was similar to that of Baal. When Israel was about to cross into the Promised Land, it was the Moabites that caused such great trouble to Israel through the hiring of the prophet Balaam to put a curse on Israel. God said, "*An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the Lord for ever*" *Deut. 23:3*. The law of God said to Israel regarding the other nations, "*Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons*" *Deut. 7:3*. Clearly, marrying Moabites was against the law of God. And like sinful compromise in our own lives, this compromise turned their short stay into a long-term residency. Originally they were to sojourn temporarily - now they dwelt there for ten years.

1:5 Three Widows

A few months roll by, and Mahlon is taken sick (means sickly). Naomi's grief increases, and Ruth is left a widow. A second tombstone is erected, and there's a second testimony that departure from God ends in disaster. The last hope that the seed-line would not be destroyed remained in Chilion, but one day they notice that his face seemed flushed; soon a lingering disease sets in (for Chilion means consumptive, pining, wasting away, declining). In spite of protests, tears, and sorrow, they bid good-bye to the last male who came out of Bethlehem. A third marker is erected to tell the story of the departure from God to the land of Moab. When Mahlon and Chilion also die prematurely, suddenly they are a house of three widows. Understand that these were different times than we are now living in. Today, a woman can find a job, support herself, and provide for her own needs. But back then, widows had to depend on the kindness of others to support them. It was a miserable existence - especially for an Israelite living in the land of Moab.

Ruth 1:6-9 Ruth's Commitment To Naomi

Back To Bethlehem

Word had gotten to Naomi that the famine was over in Bethlehem. As the three of them head off towards Israel, Naomi tells her daughters-in-law to go on home to their parents houses. This was so that they would be able to marry again. But they obviously both loved her. They wept and said, *"No, we want to go to Israel with you."* According to the law of God, the women would have to marry a brother of their husbands. *"When brothers live together and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be {married} outside {the family} to a strange man. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her to himself as wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her"* Deut. 25:5. 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. 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 as Naomi did!

But Naomi knew they had no chance of marrying any more of her sons - because she didn't have any more! She tells them, *"Go, return each to her mother's house... The Lord deal kindly with you... The Lord grant that you may find rest each in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them: and they lifted up their voice, and wept"* v.8, 9. Naomi described marriage as a place of rest. God can make it so! Their emotion shown is evidence of the real relationship of love between Naomi and her daughters-in-law. With these words Naomi freely blessed them she prayed that they would remarry

Ruth 1:14,16 Total Commitment To God

The Daughters' Decisions

"And they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her." A choice had to be made. 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. Orpah decides that she should return home, but Ruth sticks with Naomi. She makes a pledge of devotion that is beautiful: *Ruth 1:16 "...where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God."* The best-known words of Ruth are most often heard at weddings.

It seems it didn't take too much to talk Orpah into leaving. Naomi makes a very good point. Naomi doesn't have anything to offer to the girls. She is poor and can't support them financially. Life would probably be very much better if they just stayed in Moab. After all, they are Moabites. Naomi can't give them husbands. Why take so many risks and go? Why not leave Naomi? There is a sense in which it can be quite easy at times to want to walk away from the Lord.

Jesus told a parable of a farmer throwing his seed on various types of soil. It was a picture of how people act in response differently when the Word of God is planted in their lives. Thus, Naomi and Ruth traveled to Bethlehem together. While Orpah chose to leave Naomi to look for a husband, Ruth made a choice that could very possibly end with her staying single for the rest of her life. Though we don't know what happened to Orpah, we do know that Naomi found blessings beyond what she could ever have dreamed of.

What would lead to such commitment?

- **Influence of companionship:** It is a great blessing to have as a mother a true saint, or to have as a brother or a sister one who fears the Lord; and it is a special privilege to be linked for life, in the closest bonds, with one whose prayers may rise with ours, and whose praises may also mingle with ours. There is something about Christian companionship which must advise in the right direction.
- **Influence of admiration:** Ruth looked with loving reverence and admiration upon Naomi, for she saw in her a character which won her heart's esteem and affection. She was one who considered the interests of others rather than her own—to also want to care for her mother-in-law. When a Christian man so lives that others see something about him which they do not perceive in themselves, that is one way in which they are often attracted towards the Christian life. When the sick Christian is patient, when the poor Christian is cheerful, when the believer in Christ is forgiving, generous, tenderhearted, sympathetic, honest, upright, then it is that observers say, *"Here is something worth looking at; where did this excellence come from?"*
- **Influence of instruction:** There is no doubt that Naomi gave her daughter-in-law much helpful teaching. Ruth would want to know about Naomi's God, and Naomi would be only too glad to tell her all she knew. We should make people want to know what our religion really is, and then be ready to tell them.
- **Fear of separation:** There will come a day when one shall be taken and another left; and before the great separation takes place, at the judgment seat of Christ, when there shall be a separation made between the goats and the sheep, and between the tares and the wheat, I do implore you to let the

influence of the godly whom you love help to draw you towards decision for God and His Christ.

- **Influence of love:** And Naomi showed her love to Ruth. Ruth was not only prepared to live in an unknown land, with new people, new customs and a new language, but she was also prepared to worship the God of Israel. This is total commitment!

(**Note:** It is much harder for backsliders to get back into relationship and fellowship with God than for an out-and-out sinner who has never been converted. The reason is the backslider has sinned against light. The greater degree of light a sinner has, the harder it usually is for him to find God. This can be proved by the way the Jews and Gentiles received the Holy Ghost. The Jews, who were in the covenant and were children of promise, had to tarry ten days (some teach seven) for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, (Acts 2), but the Gentiles, who were afar off, having little light and no hope in the world, received the Holy Ghost while Peter was yet speaking (Acts 10:44). In the latter case, there was no tarrying, supplication, or waiting on God, but while Peter was bringing the message, the Holy Spirit came upon them in like manner as on the Jews at Pentecost. Thus, the Jews could not claim that they had any supernatural manifestations that the Gentiles did not have).

Ruth's words have survived the centuries because of her unwavering commitment to God and a person in need. She points us to the value of loving sacrifice for the Lord, and to His rich blessing on all who give themselves unselfishly to others.

SUMMARY:

The story of **Ruth** is a series of setbacks. Naomi and her husband and two sons were forced to leave their homeland in Bethlehem-Judah on account of famine. Then Naomi's husband dies. Her sons marry Moabite women and for ten years the women prove to be barren. And then her sons die an early death, leaving two widows in the house of Naomi. Apparently, the boys inherited their weak constitutions from their father, Elimelech. After hearing that bread has come to her homeland, she desired to return. She urges her daughters-in-law to return to their mothers' house that they might find husbands in their homeland, because she had no more sons for them to marry. She blessed and kissed them. Even though Ruth cleaves to Naomi, Orpah returns to Moab. As Ruth tells Naomi: *"Don't make me leave you for I want to go wherever you go, and live wherever you live; your people shall be my people, and your God shall be my God"* (v. 16TLB).

Ruth's statement of commitment concerned events, situations, and relationships that would permanently bind the two women. Ruth *"clung"* to Naomi where the same word is translated *"stayed close."* She willingly accepted an unsettled future and bound herself by solemn oath first to Naomi and ultimately to Naomi's God. This is a picture of true conversion. Ruth is committed to Naomi's people (Israel). She is leaving her old life as a Moabite behind and choosing to be an Israelite. Better yet, Ruth is committed to Naomi's God. She no longer counts herself a follower of Chemosh, but of Yahweh.

Abram left his home after being commanded to do so by God. Elimelech left the *"house of bread"* without repenting, and sojourned to a pagan place too long, attaching himself with the wrong community. However, Ruth left her pagan homeland on her own initiative, despite the protest of her mother-in-law, in order to come under the wings of God. The arrival of the two women in Bethlehem marked the beginning of a new life for Ruth.

Commitment demands a choice: seeing where you come from yet allowing God to predict your future; seeing as the prodigal son, yet saying I want to go back to my father's house of plenty; seeing that if your joy is gone, and then taking action to do something about it. It's a future of trust and faith in God, demonstrating undeniable and unquestionable commitment by faith. Through crisis, there's only *"One"* to trust in—God, and that means turning from the problem to the *"Problem Solver."* That's what Ruth did! She went from a bad situation and became committed to a new community of believers which later placed her in the lineage of Jesus Christ. How Glorious!

APPLICATION:

If you make a choice to follow Jesus, understand that there will be times when you will be tempted to walk away. Will you? Don't allow convenience to be your way out. Be fearful of separating from God.