

Preview of Ruth

The Book of Ruth is set in a dark period of Israel's history. These events occurred in the midst of religious apostasy, political unrest, and social chaos. But the light of heaven is never totally extinguished—God has never left Himself without witness.

Ruth and Boaz illustrate the fact that circumstances need not hinder God's purposes. Ruth had an ungodly background and was reduced to poverty. She needed to adjust to a foreign people and culture. Boaz, on the other hand, had apostate neighbors and faced difficulties in redeeming Ruth. But despite circumstances that could have discouraged them, Boaz and Ruth were overcomers.

Faith is the principle by which they overcame. Faith is more than a fanciful sentiment; it is an attitude toward life that is evidenced in commitment and surrender to all that God is and wants. Faith takes hold of God's resources and appropriates them. It enables the individual to possess an open mind, make a personal commitment, and apply truth to everyday life.

The Book of Ruth shows us that man cannot comprehend the usefulness of a life surrendered to God. Only God knows the end. The faithfulness of Ruth and Boaz issued into Obed, Jesse, David, and the antitype of Boaz, Jesus Christ. Ruth and Boaz did not live to reap the ultimate reward of their faithfulness, but God was able to accomplish a far-reaching influence through their lives. The work of a moment, if a work of faith, has an issue that we may never see.

The Book of Ruth can be divided very simply: Chapters 1 and 2 give us faith's venture; chapters 3 and 4 show us faith's rewards.

Ruth's example provides encouragement to any who are counting the cost of committing themselves to God. The faith that Ruth expressed held back nothing, but it yielded all to the God of Israel.

In a sense, Ruth's choice cost her everything, yet she lost nothing that really mattered. "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal" (John 12:25).

May we too be inspired with the faith of this Gentile woman who was granted a place in the lineage of the Messiah. In a similar manner, we, who were Gentiles outside the commonwealth of Israel, may become the spiritual children of Abraham today.

Lesson 6 4 March 2012

Ruth's Choice of Faith

Lesson Scope: [Ruth 1](#)

Lesson Focus

Elimelech and his wife, Naomi, with their two sons left their home in Bethlehem-Judah and sojourned in the land of Moab because of famine. Israel's departure from God to serve idols had brought God's wrath, and the famine was His punishment upon them (Deuteronomy 11:13-17).

This move may have been a matter of physical survival for the family, but it brought spiritual losses to them. After Elimelech died, his sons married heathen women, but then they died also. After the famine ended, Naomi decided to return to her homeland.

In these gloomy circumstances, Ruth, the Moabitess, emerged as a woman of faith. She chose to accompany her Jewish mother-in-law to Bethlehem, where "the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread" (Ruth 1:6). God invites all men and women to leave the destitute world for "the house of bread." Although many profess to desire divine blessings, only those who possess resolute faith choose the way of life that leads to them.

Lesson Aim: To see involvements of identifying with God and His people.

Theme Verses: [Luke 14:26-27](#). If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

Lesson Text:

Destitution

[Ruth 1:3-5](#) ³ And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons. 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. ⁵ And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband.

Decision

Ruth 1:6-18 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. 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. 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. 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. ¹⁰ And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people. ¹¹ And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with me? *are* there yet *any more* sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? ¹² Turn again, my daughters, go *your way*; for I am too old to have an husband. If I should say, I have hope, *if* I should have an husband also to night, and should also bear sons; ¹³ Would ye tarry for them till they were grown? would ye stay for them from having husbands? nay, my daughters; for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD is gone out against me. ¹⁴ And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her. ¹⁵ And she said, Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister in law. ¹⁶ And Ruth said, Intreat 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: ¹⁷ Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, *if ought* but death part thee and me. ¹⁸ When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.

Destiny

Ruth 1:19-22 ¹⁹ So they two went until they came to Bethlehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, *Is* this Naomi? ²⁰ And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. ²¹ I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty: why *then* call ye me Naomi, seeing the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me? ²² So Naomi returned, and

Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest.

Questions for Study

Destitution

1. What spiritual dangers did Elimelech's family face during their sojourn in Moab?
2. What is missing in the life of one who chooses to live independently from God and His people?

Decision

3. What factors may have caused Ruth and Orpah to return to Judah with Naomi?
4. Why did Naomi urge her daughters-in-law to return to their own people?
5. What specific areas of life did Ruth include in her commitment in Ruth 1:16-17?
6. What price must we pay to be fully committed to God?

Destiny

7. What lesson had Naomi learned from her sojourn in Moab?
8. What promises of God can we claim for our comfort during periods when our faith is tested?

Analyzing the Passage

This lesson prefigures the Gentiles coming into the faith by personal choice rather than by birth, as was the case with the Jews. Jesus came to be the Shepherd of one fold, which included both Jews and Gentiles.

The Moabites were near neighbors as well as distant relatives to Israel. They were barred from the congregation of Israel because they brought trouble to Israel after they came out of Egypt. They were an idol-worshiping people.

The move to Moab brought Elimelech's family into the midst of this idolatry. When Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem, emotional attachment moved the daughters-in-law to go with her. But Naomi laid the facts before them, urging them to consider what their choice would mean.

In Ruth 1:19, Naomi reflected on her experience in Moab saying, "Call me not Naomi [pleasant], call me Mara [bitter]: for the Almighty hath dealt

very bitterly with me." She recognized that God's chastening hand was upon her. Though these bitter experiences humbled her, they had not weakened her faith.

Beth-lehem, which means "house of bread," proved to be a place where God could bless Naomi and restore what she had lost in Moab. It also became a place where Ruth, by her personal choice, could partake of God's fullness.

In the end, both Naomi and Ruth made choices that led them to the place where God's blessings could be theirs. Naomi reestablished her relationship with God's people, and Ruth identified with them by a choice of faith, making her an heir of those same blessings.

Principles and Applications

Destitution

1. To isolate oneself God's people is costly (Ruth 1:3-5). Naomi's life in Moab brought the loss of her husband and her sons. Moab could not provide rest or the spiritual support she needed. Today the church assists in giving the nurture one needs for a vibrant Christian life. To seek such benefits from the world will only bring disappointment and frustration.

2. Identifying with God and His people requires that one understand the emptiness of the old life (Ruth 1:3-5). After Naomi reached a point of destitution, her mind turned to her homeland, her people, and her God. Like the younger son in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son, she was ready to return from her sojourn in Moab to associate again with God and His people. She had learned that the world offers nothing but spiritual poverty and emptiness.

Decision

3. Faith in God is essential in moving individuals to identify with God and His people (Ruth 1:6-7). Others can point us in the right direction, but they cannot make the choice for us. Ruth expressed faith in Naomi's God and declared her intention to go with her. By that act Naomi's faith became Ruth's faith.

4. To identify with God and His people requires that one count the cost (Ruth 1:8-12). Naomi was careful to point out to her daughters-in-law the cost of their decision to accompany her to Bethlehem. In making this life-altering decision, they needed to face reality and not be led by the emotion

of the moment. It is prudent that one weigh the consequences carefully before making such a choice.

5. Identity with God's people is a matter of personal commitment (Ruth 1:8-14). Others may give counsel and exert their influence, but they cannot make a commitment for another person. Ruth's commitment (Ruth 1:16-17) was full and unreserved. God is well-pleased with those who yield all to Him.

6. Identifying with God and His people means a full surrender of the old life (Ruth 1:15-16). One must forsake his past loyalties and the involvements of the old life. God does not accept those who try to serve Him while retaining an attachment to those things which were part of his former life. He desires that we serve Him with our whole heart.

7. One must view identity with God and His people as a lifelong commitment (Ruth 1:16-17). When Ruth stated her commitment to Naomi's God, she did not make provisions to return to Moab. She believed that God could do for her what He was doing for Naomi.

8. Choosing to identify with God and His people requires a resolute faith (Ruth 1:16-18). We must have more than a "fair weather" commitment. The choice of faith does not remove all the barriers or hindrances. It rather lays hold upon God's promises, His provisions, and His power to overcome the obstacles. A resolute faith is satisfied to leave the future with God and press onward in doing what is right today.

Destiny

9. To identify with God's people is to place oneself in the line of blessing and satisfaction (Ruth 1:22). It is the beginning of a new life. It is our duty to obey. God makes it His duty to provide. "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

Important Teachings

1. To isolate oneself from God's people is costly (Ruth 1:3-5).

2. Identifying with God and His people requires that one understand the emptiness of the old life (Ruth 1:3-5).

3. Faith in God is essential in moving individuals to identify with God and His people (Ruth 1:6-7).

4. To identify with God and His people requires that one count the cost (Ruth 1:8-12).

5. Identity with God's people is a matter of personal commitment (Ruth 1:8-14).
6. Identifying with God and His people means a full surrender of the old life (Ruth 1:15-16).
7. One must view identity with God and His people as a lifelong commitment (Ruth 1:16-17).
8. Choosing to identify with God and His people requires a resolute faith (Ruth 1:16-18).
9. To identify with God's people is to place oneself in the line of blessing and satisfaction (Ruth 1:22).

Answers to Questions

1. What spiritual dangers did Elimelech's family face during their sojourn in Moab?

These included the influence of idol-worshipping neighbors, the option to choose non-Israelites for marriage partners, the absence of collective worship opportunities, and the lack of godly companionship.

2. What is missing in the life of one who chooses to live independently from God and His people?

He is left to his own resources and ingenuity to face the difficulties of life. He does not have God as his refuge and help in time of trouble. He does not have the support of God's people but must fend for himself in a world where others are not a spiritual help to him.

3. What factors may have caused Ruth and Orpah to return to Judah with Naomi?

Among the possible factors were family ties, sympathy for Naomi's widowhood, hope for a better life in a new location, and possible marriage opportunities.

4. Why did Naomi urge her daughters-in-law to return to their own people? She was testing the sincerity of their commitment. She wanted them to count the cost of yielding themselves fully into God's hands. She did not want them to entertain unrealistic expectations, especially in regard to finding husbands.

5. What specific areas of life did Ruth include in her commitment in Ruth 1:16-17?

She specified that she would move with the people of God and live among

them. She promised to identify herself as one of God's people and to claim their God as her own. She committed herself to continue this new relationship until death.

6. What price must we pay to be fully committed to God?

We must choose God's way for our life though it may cause strain on family ties and relationships. We must be willing to stand alone when others fail to keep their commitments. We must submit to God's people and allow them to examine our life and speak to areas of need.

7. What lesson had Naomi learned from her sojourn in Moab?

She learned that sometimes God uses bitter hardships to correct and discipline His people. He chastens those who distance themselves from Him, in order to draw them back again. Naomi humbly acknowledged the hand of God in bringing affliction to cause her to return to Bethlehem.

8. What promises of God can we claim for our comfort during periods when our faith is tested?

God's chastening is an indication that we are His sons. God has promised never to leave us nor forsake us. He is with us when we pass through the waters of affliction. God has promised, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Summarizing the Lesson

The choice to identify with God and His people brings one into the way of divine blessing. Though Orpah may have desired these blessings, she chose to return to the familiar scenes of her former life. But Ruth chose to go with her mother-in-law. She placed her faith in Naomi's God and accepted all that such a choice would require of her. God looks for such a commitment in all who come to Him.

Research Guide

1. Review the spiritual conditions in Israel during the times of the judges. The people went through a number of cycles beginning with departure from God to serving idols, enemy oppression, crying out to God, and finally, the raising up of a judge to deliver them.

2. Read Deuteronomy 11:13-17, and meditate on God's promise to meet Israel's material needs as long as they served and worshiped Him.