

A Mother-Daughter Covenant

Ruth 1:6-11, 14-18
SS Lesson for 08/11/2019

Devotional Scripture: Ruth 4:13-17

OUTLINE

LESSON BACKGROUND AND KEY VERSE

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Key Verse: Ruth 1:16

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

A COVENANT INVITE TO RETURN (RUTH 1:6-8)

Return for provisions (6)

- Provisions through the glorious riches of Jesus (Phil 4:19)
- Provisions through the Word of God (Deut 8:3)
- Provisions that help to abound in every good work (2 Cor 9:8)
- Provisions through the fear of God (Ps 34:9)
- Provisions through being made rich in every way (2 Cor 9:10-11)
- Provisions through Divine resources (Gen 22:9-13)

Return for protection (7)

- Protection through God being our refuge (Ps 9:9)
- Protection through God being our rock and deliverer (Ps 18:2)
- Protection through God being an ever-present help in trouble (Ps 46:1)
- Protection through God's faithfulness (2 Thess 3:3)
- Protection through God's knowledge of how to rescue godly men (2 Peter 2:9)
- Protection because we love God (Ps 91:14)
- Protection through wisdom (Prov 4:6)

A COVENANT PROVIDING FREEDOM (RUTH 1:8-11)

Freedom provided by God (8-9)

- Freedom through God's word (Ps 119:45)
- Freedom through Jesus' ministry (Luke 4:18)
- Freedom through the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:17)
- Freedom because Jesus has set us free (Gal 5:1)
- Freedom through the calling of God (Gal 5:13)

Freedom to join a family (10)

- Freedom through the Spirit of adoption (Rom 8:15-17)
- Freedom through increasing the family (Ps 107:41)
- Freedom through fulfilling the needs of the lonely (Ps 68:6)
- Freedom through God's predestination into His family (Rom 8:29)
- Freedom through righteousness to become children of God (1 John 3:10)
- Freedom so that Gentiles can become part of God's family (Eph 3:6)

Freedom from death (11)

- Freedom from death by destroying the sting of death (1 Cor 15:55-57)
- Freedom from death by providing eternal life (Rom 5:20-21)
- Freedom from death by crucifixion of the old sinful nature (Rom 6:6)
- Freedom from death by being the gift of God (Rom 6:23)
- Freedom from death by giving life through the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:11)

A COVENANT OF COMMITMENT (RUTH 1:14-18)

Commitment to family (14-15)

- Committed to family through being committed to God (Acts 10:1-2)
- Committed to family through being committed to following (Acts 16:29-34)
- Committed to family as a blessing (Ps 128:3-4)
- Committed to family through becoming mature in Christ (Deut 4:9)
- Committed to family through being committed to each other (Prov 31:27-28)

Commitment to follow (16)

- Followers have the protection of having God with them (Josh 1:6-9)
- Followers have the protection of God strengthening and helping them (Isa 41:10)
- Followers have the protection of having God for them (Rom 8:31)
- Followers have the protection of God's deliverance (2 Thess 3:1-4)

Followers have the protection of other followers (Acts 18:9-10)

Followers have the protection of God's rescue (Jer 1:17-19)

Commitment for eternity (17-18)

Committed for eternity in a kingdom that cannot be shaken (Heb 12:28)

Committed for eternity in God's eternal glory (1 Peter 5:10)

Committed for eternity in Jesus (Col 2:6-7)

Committed for eternity by remaining in Jesus (John 15:5-7)

Committed for eternity by focusing on the godly unseen (2 Cor 4:17-18)

CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

COMMENTARY THOUGHTS FROM BOB DEFFINBAUGH

Conclusion

What Can We Learn from Naomi?

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE ECHOES COMMENTARY

Lesson Background and Key Verse

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The story of Ruth takes place during the period of the judges (Ruth 1:1), which lasted from about 1370 to 1050 BC. This situates the story in a spiritually dark period of Israel's history. For one thing, divine inspiration through prophets was rare (1 Samuel 3:1). For another, Israel's population at that time routinely abandoned the teachings of the Mosaic covenant in favor of simply doing whatever they thought was right in the moment (Judges 2:10–19). Israel had no king in those days (Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). This statement is often taken as a positive appraisal of the forthcoming kingship in Israel; it suggests that kingly leadership would keep the nation on a better track spiritually (compare Psalm 72:1; Proverbs 16:12; Isaiah 9:7). An alternate appraisal, however, is entirely negative: the nation's spiritual state was so poor that the people didn't even need a king to lead them down the wrong path (see 1 Kings 16:29–33; 2 Kings 15:27–28; etc.). In either case, the author's observations reflect poorly on the covenant people of God, who regularly snubbed their divine king. Against this dark backdrop, the story of Ruth provides a ray of sunshine. Self-centeredness and idolatry were not universal. Some people still acknowledged God as they made their plans.

The Old Testament preserves accounts of non-Israelites acknowledging Israel's God as being supreme. After hearing of the Israelites' deliverance from Egypt, Rahab acknowledged the Lord as God in Heaven and on earth (Joshua 2:8–11). Upon being cured of leprosy, Naaman the Syrian declared there to be no God anywhere in the world except Israel (2 Kings 5:15). In some instances, foreigners recognized the greatness of Israel's God better than the Israelites themselves did (contrast 1 Kings 16:29–34; 17:7–24; compare Luke 4:25–27). The book of the Bible in today's study, Ruth, is named after a non-Israelite. Yet the story arguably centers more on the words, actions, and mental state of Naomi, who was Ruth's Israelite mother-in-law. At the point where today's text picks up their story, the Israelite Naomi had been living in Moab for some 10 years. She, husband Elimelek, and their two sons had had to leave their hometown of Bethlehem due to famine (Ruth 1:1–5). The Bible records several famines that prompt people to leave the promised land of Canaan for greener pastures. Most notably, Jacob and his sons relied upon Egypt during seven years of famine and eventually migrated there with their families (Genesis 41–46; compare Genesis 12:10; 2 Kings 8:1, 2). We are not specifically told whether this famine arose from divine wrath, though Israel was warned of this possibility (Deuteronomy 11:13–17; Amos 4:9). While in Moab, the two sons "married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth" (Ruth 1:4a). However, the passing of a decade finds the husbands of Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth deceased (1:4b, 5). Women without husbands or adult sons usually face desperate circumstances in ancient times. Such is the backdrop of the interaction of the three women—only one of which is an Israelite—in today's text.

Key Verse: Ruth 1:16

But Ruth said: "Entreat me not to leave you, Or to turn back from following after you; For wherever you go, I will go; And wherever you lodge, I will lodge; Your people shall be my people, And your God, my God."

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

1:1. The events recorded in the Book of Ruth occurred in the period of **the Judges**, probably during the administration of the judge Gideon. The **famine in the land** was probably God's acting in judgment on His sinning people. Many years later in Elijah's day God sent another famine as judgment on Israel for worshiping Baal (1 Kings 16:30-17:1; 18:21, 37; 19:10). Divine control of the crops was a major factor in the development of events in the Book of Ruth. During the period of the Judges, worship of the Canaanite god Baal was common among the Israelites (Judges 2:11; 3:7; 8:33; 10:6, 10). Baal was believed to be owner of the land and to control its fertility. Baal's female counterpart was Ashtoreth. Sexual intercourse between these two gods was believed to regulate fertility of the earth and its creatures. God had commanded the Israelites under Joshua's leadership to purge the land of the Canaanites and their idols (Deut. 7:16; 12:2-3; 20:17). The failure of the Israelites to do so (Josh. 16:10; Judges 1:27-33) left them open to the temptation to look to the idols rather than to God for agricultural blessing. Perhaps the cultic prostitution and sexual practices used in the worship of Baal also enticed the Hebrew people. Interestingly Gideon's father had built an altar to Baal, but Gideon had destroyed it (Judges 6:25-34). The Ruth narrative shows the wisdom of trusting in God and His providence rather than in Canaanite gods. Bethlehem was about five miles south of Jerusalem. Later Obed, son of Ruth and Boaz, was born in Bethlehem and Obed's grandson David was born in Bethlehem (Ruth 4:18-21; 1 Sam. 17:58). Bethlehem, of course, would also be the birthplace of David's greater Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 2:4-7). **A man from Bethlehem** decided to take his family to **Moab**, about 50 miles east on the other side of the Dead Sea. He intended to live there for a short period. Nothing is said about why he chose Moab. Probably he had heard that there was no famine there. However, the unfolding events indicate that it was an unwise choice, and that Bethlehem, not Moab, was the place where God would bless him. The inhabitants of Moab were excluded from the congregation of the Lord (Deut. 23:3-6). (On the origin of the Moabites cf. Gen. 19:30-38.) They were worshippers of the god Chemosh, a deity whose worship was similar to that of Baal.

1:2. **The man's name was Elimelech**, his wife was **Naomi**, and their **two sons were Mahlon and Kilion**. Some Bible students make much of the fact that the name Elimelech means "My God is king," but he may or may not have lived up to his name. (See vv. 20-21 for a wordplay on Naomi's name.) The term **Ephrathites** was a designation for the inhabitants of Ephrath (also spelled Ephratah and Ephratha), another name for Bethlehem (cf. 4:11; Gen. 35:19; 48:7; Micah 5:2).

1:3. Naomi faced the distressing problem of her husband's death. How long they had lived in Moab before Elimelech's death is not known. But Naomi, though widowed, sorrowing, and in a foreign land, had hope while **her two sons** were still alive. Naomi now became the central figure in the narrative.

1:4. Naomi's two sons **married Moabite women... Orpah and Ruth**. These marriages were not condemned. Though the Mosaic Law prohibited Israelites from marrying the Canaanites (Deut. 7:3), the Law did not say Israelites could not marry Moabites. However, Solomon's experience later showed that the greatest problem in such a marriage is the temptation to serve the gods of one's foreign wife (1 Kings 11:1-6; cf. Mal. 2:11). No doubt orthodox Israelites would have thought that marrying Moabite women was unwise. The Book of Ruth does not record the length of these marriages but they were childless. Not till Ruth 4:10 does the reader learn which son (Mahlon) married Ruth. **They... lived** in Moab **about 10 years** which was probably longer than the family intended to stay (cf. "for a while," 1:1).

1:5. Then Naomi's two sons **died**. Jewish tradition has regarded the death of these three males (Elimelech, **Mahlon, and Kilion**) as God's punishment for their leaving Bethlehem. Though that is possible, the text does not indicate it. **Naomi** had now accumulated a great load of personal grief. **Her husband** and her only **sons** had died before their time. She was a stranger in a foreign land. If the family name were to carry on, there had to be an heir. But having no sons, Naomi **was left without** hope. Her Moabite daughters-in-law offered her no apparent means to an heir. The main narrative portion now begins. Dialogue was the primary device used by the author. Fifty-nine of the 84 verses in the book contain dialogue, beginning in verse 8. Naomi resolved to return home, and in so doing she believed that she had to leave her daughters-in-law in Moab because she thought that would be best for them. She received a surprise when Ruth resolved to return with her.

1:6-7. **Naomi** learned that rain had come to her homeland. The famine was ended and God provided **food** (crops from the field and fruit from the trees). It was **the LORD** who had stopped the famine and given rain; it was not Baal, who the Canaanites believed was the god who sent rain. **Return** is a key word in Ruth. Hebrew forms of this word are used several times in this first chapter. Here is an apt illustration of repentance. Naomi reversed the direction she and her husband had taken. She turned away from **Moab** and

the errors of the past. She turned her back on the tragic graves of her loved ones and headed **back to Judah**, her homeland.

1:8 Naomi, sensing that the prospects of her daughters-in-law for remarriage in Israel would be slight, urged them to stay in Moab. Her telling each of them to return to her **mother's home** was unusual in a male-dominated society. Since Naomi was thinking of their remarriages, she may have referred to their mothers because her daughters-in-law would have discussed their wedding plans with their mothers. The word **kindness** is the Hebrew word *hesed*. It is an important word in the Book of Ruth (cf. 2:20; 3:10) and throughout the Old Testament. It speaks of God's covenant loyalty to His people. It involves grace in that it was extended even when it was not deserved. Here divine will and human action went hand in hand. Both God and humans were doers of *hesed*. The basis of Naomi's blessing was the gracious actions of Ruth and Orpah to their husbands and to Naomi. Both young women were worthy in the eyes of their mother-in-law, so she wanted God to be good to them. Though they were foreigners, they had married Israelite men and thus were under God's covenant.

1:9-10. Naomi then asked that God would give **each of** them a place of **rest** with **another husband**. This became a key issue in the book. Marriage meant security for a woman. And yet ironically Ruth seemed to be giving up this possibility by leaving Moab. Naomi's kisses were intended as farewells, but both women stated their desire to return with Naomi. Possibly a custom in that day required this.

1:11. Three times **Naomi** insisted that they **return** to Moab (vv. 11-12, 15). They needed to be sure to remarry. In the ancient Near East a woman without a husband was in a serious situation because she lacked security. And widows were especially needy. Naomi referred to the levirate custom in Israel in which a brother was responsible to marry his deceased brother's wife in order to conceive a son and perpetuate his brother's name and inheritance (Deut. 25:5-10). Naomi pointed out that this would not be possible in their case since she had no **more sons**.

1:12-13. Naomi said that she was past the age of childbearing. Even if she did acquire a new **husband** and have **sons** it was ridiculous to think that Orpah and Ruth would **wait** for them to **grow up**. Naomi seemed a bit insensitive to the grief of her daughters-in-law. She thought that her case was **more bitter** than theirs because they still had potential for childbearing. She regarded her plight as a result of God's affliction (cf. vv. 20-21). Naomi was apparently in a stage of grief that caused her to speak in anger against God. And yet she was still a woman of faith. She had no doubt that God was actively involved in their lives (cf. vv. 8-9; 2:20). She saw God as sovereign and the ultimate cause of life's issues.

1:14. Orpah should not be unduly criticized for returning to Moab. She was obeying the wishes of **her mother-in-law**. Nothing more is said in the Book of Ruth about Orpah. Presumably she remarried in Moab. Ruth, however, did the unexpected. Though Orpah chose to seek a husband, **Ruth clung to** Naomi, apparently choosing to follow and serve her widowed mother-in-law rather than seek a husband. In Ruth's mind the decision probably meant that she would never have a husband or children. James would have considered her concern for her widowed mother-in-law a profoundly religious act (James 1:27).

1:15. Naomi again urged Ruth to return to her home. She cited the example of Orpah's obedience to her request. Naomi was aware that the decision to return meant the continuing influence of the Moabite **gods** including Chemosh the chief god (Num. 21:29; 1 Kings 11:7), but the importance of Ruth's having a husband seemed to outweigh this concern. Naomi did not make it easy for Ruth to come to faith in the God of Israel.

1:16. Ruth had endured three entreaties of her mother-in-law to return home to Moab (vv. 11-12, 15). But she chose life with Naomi over her family, her national identity, and her religious idolatry. In one of the most beautiful expressions of commitment in all the world's literature she laced her future to that of Naomi. She confessed allegiance to the **people** of Israel (**your people**) and to the **God** of Israel (**your God**). Here was a stirring example of a complete break with the past. Like Abraham Ruth decided to leave her ancestors' idolatrous land to go to the land of promise. And Ruth did it without the encouragement of a promise. In fact she made her decision despite Naomi's strenuous encouragement to do otherwise.

1:17. Ruth's decision was so strong that it included reference to death and burial. She would stay with Naomi to death and beyond. To seal the quality of her decision, Ruth invoked judgment from Israel's God if she were to break her commitment of loyalty to her mother-in-law. Ruth's conversion was complete. The events that followed show that her life matched her confession.

1:18. Naomi then **stopped urging** Ruth to go back to Moab. Since Ruth had invoked God's name in her commitment (v. 17), Naomi acquiesced. Nothing more could be said. The Book of Ruth says nothing about

Naomi welcoming her daughter-in-law to the fold of those who trusted in Israel's God. **Ruth** had leaped by faith the barriers that had been thrown up before her.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

A Covenant Invite to Return (Ruth 1:6-8)

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 that the Lord had visited His people by giving them bread.

7 Therefore she went out 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.

Return for provisions (6)

Provisions through the glorious riches of Jesus (Phil 4:19)

19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

Provisions through the Word of God (Deut 8:3)

3 He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

Provisions that help to abound in every good work (2 Cor 9:8)

8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

Provisions through the fear of God (Ps 34:9)

9 Fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing.

Provisions through being made rich in every way (2 Cor 9:10-11)

10 Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. 11 You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

Provisions through Divine resources (Gen 22:9-13)

9 When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. 11 But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. 12 "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." 13 Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son.

Return for protection (7)

Protection through God being our refuge (Ps 9:9)

9 The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.

Protection through God being our rock and deliverer (Ps 18:2)

2 The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

Protection through God being an ever-present help in trouble (Ps 46:1)

46 God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

Protection through God's faithfulness (2 Thess 3:3)

3 But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.

Protection through God's knowledge of how to rescue godly men (2 Peter 2:9)

9 If this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.

Protection because we love God (Ps 91:14)

14 "Because he loves me," says the Lord, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.

Protection through wisdom (Prov 4:6)

6 Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you.

A Covenant Providing Freedom (Ruth 1:8-11)

8 And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each to her mother's house. The Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me.

9 The Lord grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband." So she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.

10 And they said to her, "Surely we will return with you to your people."

11 But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Are there still sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?"

Freedom provided by God (8-9)

Freedom through God's word (Ps 119:45)

45 I will walk about in freedom, for I have sought out your precepts.

Freedom through Jesus' ministry (Luke 4:18)

18 "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed,

Freedom through the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:17)

17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

Freedom because Jesus has set us free (Gal 5:1)

1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Freedom through the calling of God (Gal 5:13)

13 You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.

Freedom to join a family (10)

Freedom through the Spirit of adoption (Rom 8:15-17)

15 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Freedom through increasing the family (Ps 107:41)

41 But he lifted the needy out of their affliction and increased their families like flocks.

Freedom through fulfilling the needs of the lonely (Ps 68:6)

6 God sets the lonely in families, he leads forth the prisoners with singing; but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land.

Freedom through God's predestination into His family (Rom 8:29)

29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

Freedom through righteousness to become children of God (1 John 3:10)

10 This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.

Freedom so that Gentiles can become part of God's family (Eph 3:6)

6 This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

Freedom from death (11)

Freedom from death by destroying the sting of death (1 Cor 15:55-57)

55 "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Freedom from death by providing eternal life (Rom 5:20-21)

20 The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, 21 so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Freedom from death by crucifixion of the old sinful nature (Rom 6:6)

6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—

Freedom from death by being the gift of God (Rom 6:23)

23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Freedom from death by giving life through the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:11)

11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.

A Covenant of Commitment (Ruth 1:14-18)

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

15 And she said, "Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law."

16 But Ruth said: "Entreat me not to leave you, Or to turn back from following after you; For wherever you go, I will go; And wherever you lodge, I will lodge; Your people shall be my people, And your God, my God.

17 Where you die, I will die, And there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, If anything but death parts you and me."

18 When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she stopped speaking to her.

Commitment to family (14-15)

Committed to family through being committed to God (Acts 10:1-2)

1 At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. 2 He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.

Committed to family through being committed to following (Acts 16:29-34)

29 The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved — you and your household." 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. 33 At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. 34 The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God — he and his whole family.

Committed to family as a blessing (Ps 128:3-4)

3 Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your sons will be like olive shoots around your table. 4 Thus is the man blessed who fears the Lord.

Committed to family through becoming mature in Christ (Deut 4:9)

9 Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.

Committed to family through being committed to each other (Prov 31:27-28)

27 She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. 28 Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her:

Commitment to follow (16)

Followers have the protection of having God with them (Josh 1:6-9)

6 "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. 7 Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. 8 Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. 9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

Followers have the protection of God strengthening and helping them (Isa 41:10)

10 So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Followers have the protection of having God for them (Rom 8:31)

31 What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?

Followers have the protection of God's deliverance (2 Thess 3:1-4)

1 Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. 2 And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith. 3 But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. 4 We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command.

Followers have the protection of other followers (Acts 18:9-10)

9 One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. 10 For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city."

Followers have the protection of God's rescue (Jer 1:17-19)

17 "Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them. 18 Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land — against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. 19 They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the Lord.

Commitment for eternity (17-18)

Committed for eternity in a kingdom that cannot be shaken (Heb 12:28)

28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe,

Committed for eternity in God's eternal glory (1 Peter 5:10)

10 And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

Committed for eternity in Jesus (Col 2:6-7)

6 So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, 7 rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

Committed for eternity by remaining in Jesus (John 15:5-7)

5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

Committed for eternity by focusing on the godly unseen (2 Cor 4:17-18)

17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

Conclusion

I believe the opening words of *A Tale of Two Cities* go like this: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times... ." Surely these words aptly describe Ruth in the period of the judges. The final chapters of the Book of Judges are certainly "the worst of times," and yet the Book of Ruth describes the "best of times." This suggests to me that godly character is not only evident in the good times, but even more dramatically in the bad times. Many, including me, are troubled by the times in which we live, but this is no excuse for ungodly behavior. These are the times of darkness when godliness should shine forth as a brilliant light. The story of Ruth and Boaz (yes, and even Naomi) should encourage us to live godly lives in dark days, days of unbelief, disobedience, and disregard for the Word of God.

The first chapter of Ruth is very important because our appraisal of Ruth, Naomi, and (soon) Boaz in the first chapters of Ruth will greatly shape our understanding of the rest of the book. There are those who attempt to "guild the lily" as they read the Book of Ruth, desperately seeking some basis for making a pious Israelite of Naomi. Such is not the case, my friend, and seeing her as some kind of heroine will distort our understanding of the message of this wonderful book. Naomi is not at all like Ruth or Boaz; she is, in fact, a backdrop against which Ruth and Boaz are contrasted.

As I was studying our text for this message, it occurred to me that the text which describes the origin of the Moabites in [Genesis 19](#) is a key to understanding the story of Ruth, and especially Naomi's role in this account.

Look with me at these words from Genesis 19, taking up just after the account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and Lot's escape, along with his daughters:

30 Lot went up from Zoar with his two daughters and settled in the mountains because he was afraid to live in Zoar. So he lived in a cave with his two daughters. 31 Later the older daughter said to the younger, "Our father is old, and there is no man anywhere nearby to have sexual relations with us, according to the way of all the world. 32 Come, let's make our father drunk with wine so we can have sexual relations with him and preserve our family line through our father." 33 So that night they made their father drunk with wine, and the older daughter came and had sexual relations with her father. But he was not aware that she had sexual relations with him and then got up. 34 So in the morning the older daughter said to the younger, "Since I had sexual relations with my father last night, let's make him drunk again tonight. Then you go and have sexual relations with him so we can preserve our family line through our father." 35 So they made their father drunk that night as well, and the younger one came and had sexual relations with him. But he was not aware that she had sexual relations with him and then got up. 36 In this way both of Lot's daughters became pregnant by their father. 37 **The older daughter gave birth to a son and named him Moab. He is the ancestor of the Moabites of today.** 38 The younger daughter also gave birth to a son and named him Ben-Ammi. He is the ancestor of the Ammonites of today (Genesis 19:30-38, emphasis mine).

God had just destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah because of their great sin. Lot and his family were spared, but his wife died (turned to salt) because she looked back. Lot and his two daughters are now living in a cave. The oldest daughter (who will become the mother of Moab) saw their situation as impossible. There were no men nearby to marry, she reasoned, so there was no conventional way for them to bear children and thus to preserve their father's line. In such a declared "emergency," she reasoned, they must take extraordinary measures. And so this older daughter persuaded her younger sister that both of them needed to get their father drunk, and then each should lie with him, so that they might produce offspring for their father. And so they did. The son of the oldest daughter was named Moab; the son of the younger daughter was named Ammon. This is the origin of the Moabites and the Ammonites.

In Judges 19-21, we find a similar situation. There we read of the Sodom-like immorality of some of the Benjamites in the city of Gibeah, which resulted in the near extinction of their tribe. Both the Benjamites' sin and their judgment are similar to what happened in Genesis 19. Like Moab's mother, the Israelites reasoned that due to their circumstances, an Israelite line might become extinct. And so they, like Lot's daughters (the oldest one in particular), devised a scheme whereby the line would be preserved, albeit apart from faith and obedience to God's Word. They produced offspring for the Benjamites by orchestrating the kidnapping and rape of 200 virgins. The Israelites were like Moab's mother in that they were thinking and acting like Moabites.

The same is true for Naomi. I can imagine how it alarmed and frightened Naomi when Elimelech died while they were sojourning in Moab. Who would carry on his line? Was it at Naomi's initiative that her sons took Moabite women for wives? And when both her sons died without bearing children, her situation seemed impossible. She had given up all hope. The best thing for her to do was to return to Bethlehem and live out the rest of her days, dying "empty" (i.e., childless). The best thing for Orpah and Ruth to do was to return to their people and their gods, Naomi concluded. But when Ruth refused to return to her people and accompanied her to Bethlehem, Boaz entered the picture, a close relative, a possible redeemer. And Naomi was now ready to arrange for a marriage and offspring in an "unconventional" way, just as Tamar, the mother of Moab, and the Israelites (more recently) did. We shall see more about this in chapter 3.

What Can We Learn from Naomi?

The danger of practicing pragmatism above principle. It was my friend Dave Austin who reminded me of the danger of pragmatism from this text. Lot's daughters, the Israelites (on behalf of the Benjamites), and Naomi are inclined to resort to a pragmatic solution, rather than one that is faith-based and rooted in principle. A few years later, king Saul will offer the sacrifices, even though he was instructed to wait for Samuel, all because Saul felt this was a crisis that justified setting aside obedience in faith to God's Word.

Another label for pragmatism is "doing what seems right in our own eyes." That was the spirit of the age during the days of the judges. We, too, live in very pragmatic times, and those who live by principle – especially the principles of God's Word – are few and far between. Even professing Christians can fall victim to the tyranny of the urgent. The crises of life are God's pop quizzes, times when He puts our faith to the test, times when He gives us an opportunity to put our faith on display. People of faith in God often stand out in times of crisis, so let us live by the principles of Scripture, rather than by pragmatism.

Naomi should teach us to be careful about accepting the counsel of those who seem to be well meaning. I hate to say this, but after being involved in ministry for many years, I would have to say that some of the worst counsel I have ever heard has come from well-meaning Christians. A Christian wife is having difficulties in her relationship with her husband, and she shares this with a Christian friend. Many are the times when friends counsel others to act in their own best interests, and all too seldom do they point their friends to the difficult principles and commands of Scripture. And they will do this because they believe they are doing their friend a favor. That is precisely what Naomi did with Orpah and Ruth. She gave them very pragmatic counsel, based upon what could be seen, rather than on God's Word and the principle of faith.

I am reminded of Satan's strategy in the Garden of Eden. He came alongside Eve as her friend, as someone who was doing her a favor. His counsel (even though it effectively called God a liar) was given as though it were in her best interest. The ultimate test is the Word of God and Naomi's counsel, while it sometimes used God's name, did not conform to God's Word. Naomi counseled Orpah and Ruth to do what seemed right in their eyes. *Beware of well-meaning advice that is not rooted in Scripture and that is supportive of what you would really like to do, rather than what God commands us to do.*

Naomi instructs us to beware of Calvinism run amuck. Naomi did not doubt the existence of God nor did she doubt His power. The term she used to refer to Him – Shaddai – was a term that emphasized God's great power. But she concluded that God was using His power against her, rather than for her. It led to a hopeless fatalism: "It doesn't really matter what I say or do; God is against me, and there is nothing I can do about it."

Now I should stop to say that I firmly believe in the sovereignty of God, that God is in absolute control of everything that takes place on this earth. It is not Naomi's belief in the sovereignty of God that troubles me as much as how she applies it. She views God as harsh and uncaring, doling out affliction and trouble in a way that is completely unrelated to her attitudes and actions. She does not acknowledge sin on her part (and Elimelech's), and she does not seek to repent. She believes in a God who is all powerful, but who is not merciful and compassionate. Such people are in misery, and honestly, they make those around them miserable as well. What a difference it makes to believe in a God who is in absolute control and who is also merciful and gracious, causing all things to work together for our good and for His glory, if we believe in Him.

Naomi was preoccupied with the here and now, rather than trusting in God's covenant promises by faith. Naomi's hope was in the physical rather than in the spiritual, in the present rather than in eternity. To her, God's blessings should appear now, in the form of bread, an eligible bachelor (marriage), and babies. Naomi saw singleness (widowhood for her) and childlessness as a curse, while Paul taught that singleness could facilitate ministry to others and to God (1 Corinthians 7:32-35). At this point in time, one would not think that Naomi would be at the top of the list in the hall of faith:

13 These all died in faith without receiving the things promised, but they saw them in the distance and welcomed them and acknowledged that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth. 14 For those who speak in such a way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. 15 In fact, if they had been thinking of the land that they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But as it is, they aspire to a better land, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them (Hebrews 11:13-16).

We should learn from Naomi that if barrenness is one's earthly fate, our heavenly fate is vastly different. Naomi, so to speak, put all of her eggs into one basket – marriage and bearing children. There is no doubt that this is a great honor and privilege for a woman. But it is not the essence of what our life in Christ is about. That is why some men and women will choose never to marry or to bear children.

(Adapted from URL: <https://bible.org/seriespage/1-return-bethlehem-ruth-1>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

An array of related terminology makes apparent that the expressions of loyalty between Naomi and Ruth reflect a covenantal bond (compare Ruth 1:16, 17 with 1 Kings 22:4; 2 Kings 3:7). The story shows the God of Israel as a God who cares for the disadvantaged, sometimes directly (compare Ruth 1:6; 4:13), but often through the actions of obedient people. Today's account concerning actions of a Moabite woman may have confronted Israel in a way similar to Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan, with its positive portrayal of a despised neighbor (Luke 10:25–37). Even if we are not a “despised neighbor,” the example of Ruth should be a call to action. I know a widow who lives in service to others. She sponsors a scholarship fund for ministry students. She corresponds with missionaries and former students. Countless members of our congregation have been touched by the encouragement of her prayers, cards, visits, and character. Not all selfless acts are as dramatic as Ruth's returning with Naomi, nor need they be. The disadvantaged are all around us. They are those who battle with addiction, suffer with grief, struggle to make ends meet, are homeless, are despondent widows and widowers, etc. Acts of kindness to such folks draw the pleasure of our heavenly Father (Matthew 5:3, 4). Though he involves himself even more directly when he chooses, God often chooses to employ his people as his hands and feet (Isaiah 6:8; etc.). As he uses Ruth's covenant with Naomi, so are we his instruments. And he uses us best when we heed the words of James 1:27: “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress.”

Concluding Thoughts from the Echoes Commentary

Adverse Circumstances Bring People Together - When a famine came to Bethlehem, Naomi and her husband moved to the pagan nation of Moab with their sons to escape the food shortage. While living in Moab, both her sons married Moabite women named Ruth and Orpah. Soon after, Naomi's husband and both sons died, and when she heard the famine was over, she decided to move back home.

Committing to Others Like Yourself is Common - Naomi encouraged her daughters-in-law to return to the places of their birth with family and friends. She had no sons left for them to marry nor any inheritance. She wished for them to remarry and find comfort in the house of another husband, so she blessed them. The three embraced and cried. At first, the young women followed Naomi, but she insisted they go back. She knew she was too old to marry and have more children. According to the law, the brother cared for the widow, but in this case, Naomi had no more children. And, she added, she felt the Lord's hand stood against her.

Committing to Befriend Someone Unlike Yourself is Unusual - Her daughters-in-law still wanted to stay with her. Orpah finally was persuaded to stay in Moab, but Ruth committed herself to Naomi. She vowed to continue on with Naomi, worship her God, and become a part of the Jewish nation. No doubt, Naomi looked at this young woman, so very different from herself, and wondered how she could make such a strong commitment. While living with this Jewish family, Ruth must have observed something in Naomi, a woman of faith, or heard about her God. Something led her to forsake Moab, their false gods, and make this strong alliance to go with Naomi. A shared belief in Christ can cause two very different people to join together. The focal point is on their faith that draws them together, not their dissimilarities.