



LESSON EIGHT

Elimelech's Swerving, Naomi's Returning and Ruth's Choosing

Scripture Reading:

Ruth 1:1-22

- 1:1** Now in the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. And a man from Bethlehem in Judah went down to dwell as a sojourner in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons.
- 1:2** And the man's name was Elimelech, and his wife's name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah. And they went to the country of Moab and remained there.
- 1:3** And Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left with her two sons.
- 1:4** And they took wives for themselves from among the Moabite women. One's name was Orpah, and the second's name was Ruth. And they dwelt there about ten years.
- 1:5** And both Mahlon and Chilion died, and the woman was left without her two children and her husband.
- 1:6** So she went forth from the place where she had been, along with her two daughters-in-law; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah.
- 1:7** Then she rose up with her daughters-in-law in order to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that Jehovah had visited His people by giving them food.
- 1:8** And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, Go and return, each of you, to your mother's house. May Jehovah deal kindly with you, just as you have dealt with the dead and with me.
- 1:9** May Jehovah grant you to find rest, each of you in the house of your husband. Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voice and wept.
- 1:10** And they said to her, No, we will return with you to your people.
- 1:11** And Naomi said, Return, my daughters. Why should you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?
- 1:12** Return, my daughters, go; for I am too old to have a husband. If I said, I have hope; even if I had a husband tonight and even bore sons;
- 1:13** Would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from having a husband? No, my daughters; it has been far more bitter for me than *it should be* for you, for the hand of Jehovah has gone forth against me.
- 1:14** And they lifted up their voice and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.
- 1:15** And she said, Your sister-in-law has now returned to her people and to her gods; return with your sister-in-law.
- 1:16** But Ruth said, Do not entreat me to leave you and turn away from following after you. For wherever you go, I will go, and wherever you dwell, I will dwell; and your people will be my people, and your God will be my God.
- 1:17** Where you die, I will die; and there will I be buried. Jehovah do so to me, and more as well, if anything but death parts me from you.
- 1:18** And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she ceased speaking to her *about it*.
- 1:19** So the two of them traveled until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, all the city was stirred because of them; and *the women* said, Is this Naomi?
- 1:20** And she said to them, Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara; for the All-sufficient One has dealt very bitterly with me.
- 1:21** I went out full, but Jehovah has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, when Jehovah has afflicted me and the All-sufficient One has dealt harshly with me?
- 1:22** So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

QUESTIONS:

Section 1:

1. What is the main role of the book of Ruth and why is this book so important?
2. What is the intrinsic significance of the book Ruth?
3. What is the central thought of the book of Ruth?

Section 2:

1. What does it mean to leave the good land?
2. Explain that the book of Ruth is 'the book of rest'.
3. Why did God send a famine in the good land?

Section 3:

1. What was Naomi's proposal to her two daughters-in-law in her return to the good land?
2. What was Ruth's response to the proposal? What is the result of her choosing?

I. RUTH BEING AN APPENDIX TO THE BOOK OF JUDGES, CONTEMPORARY WITH THE FIRST HALF OF JUDGES

Ruth is an appendix to the book of Judges, contemporary with the first half of Judges. Judges is a book of Israel's miserable history, dark and stinking; Ruth is the record of a couple's excellent story, bright and aromatic. The main role in this story is like a lily growing out of brambles and a bright star in the dark night.

II. THE BOOK OF RUTH BEING AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE GENEALOGY OF CHRIST

The book of Ruth is also an important part of the genealogy of Christ (Matt. 1:5), which is the record that concerns the incarnation of Christ.

In the whole universe, there is nothing greater than the incarnation of Christ. After the eternal God created man, He was nearly silent for four thousand years. During that time no one knew what God was doing. The angels did not know, and the men in the Old Testament, such as Abraham, Moses, and David, did not know. Then the eternal God came out of eternity and entered into time. He came out of eternity with His divinity in order to enter into humanity to make Himself, the Divine, one with man, the human, to become a God-man. This is the greatest thing in the entire universe. The short book of Ruth, containing only four chapters, is related in a particular way to the incarnation of Christ.

III. THE WRITER

According to the contents of Ruth, its writer should be Samuel, as is the case also with the book of Judges.

IV. THE TIME

According to the word "Jesse begot David" (4:22), the time of writing must have been after the rule of the judges and in the time of the kings. The time of the history covered in this book comprises eleven years, from about 1322 B.C. (1:4) to about 1312 B.C. (4:13).

V. THE PLACE

The history recorded in the book of Ruth took place in Moab and Judah (1:1, 22).

VI. THE CONTENT

The content of this book concerns a Moabitess, Ruth. Ruth belonged to the tribe of Moab (v. 4). Moab was the son of Lot, the fruit of Lot's incestuous union with his daughter (Gen. 19:30-38). According to Deuteronomy 23:3 the Moabites were forbidden to enter the congregation of the Lord, even to the tenth generation. Thus, as a Moabitess, Ruth was an excluded one. Nevertheless, she was brought into the holy elect of God and became an important ancestor of Christ through her marriage with Boaz, the great-grandfather of King David (Ruth 4:21-22; Matt. 1:5-6), which became a factor that ushered in the incarnation of Christ (Matt. 1:5-16). From this we see that Ruth became an important ancestor to bring Christ into humanity. This ushered in the marvelous incarnation, which made God one with man. This is the intrinsic significance of the content of the book of Ruth.

VII. THE CENTRAL THOUGHT

The central thought of the book of Ruth is that a Gentile, even a Moabitess, could be joined to God's holy elect and become an heir to partake of the holy inheritance through her union with the one of the holy elect who redeemed her. This is not merely a type but a complete prefigure of the Gentile sinners' being brought, with Israel, God's elect, into the divine inheritance through the redemption of Christ in their union with Him.

VIII. THE SECTIONS

The book of Ruth has six sections.

A. Elimelech's Swerving from the Rest in God's Economy

The first section (1:1-2) shows us that Elimelech, one of God's elect, swerved from the rest in God's economy.

B. Naomi's Returning to the Rest in God's Economy

The second section (1:3-7, 19-22) concerns Naomi's returning to the rest in God's economy. Whereas Elimelech swerved from this rest, Naomi returned to it.

C. Ruth's Choosing for Her Goal

Some expositors speak of Ruth's resolution or determination. What we see in Ruth, however, is not just her resolution or her determination but her choosing for her goal. This is described in the third section of the book (1:8-18).

D. Ruth's Exercising of Her Right

The next section of this book (ch. 2) covers Ruth's exercising of her right. After she made a choice regarding her goal, she exercised her right.

E. Ruth's Seeking for Her Rest

The fifth section of this book (ch. 3) covers Ruth's seeking for her rest. Once she exercised the right that came to her through her choosing for her goal, Ruth, in wisdom, sought for her rest.

F. Ruth's Reward for God's Economy

Because Ruth was absolute for God's economy, she received a reward from God. Ruth's reward for God's economy is covered in chapter four, the last section of this book.

----- [SECTION 2] -----

ELIMELECH'S SWERVING, NAOMI'S RETURNING, AND RUTH'S CHOOSING

In this message we will consider Ruth 1, a chapter that covers Elimelech's swerving, Naomi's returning, and Ruth's choosing.

I. ELIMELECH'S SWERVING FROM THE REST IN GOD'S ECONOMY

In verses 1 and 2 we see that Elimelech swerved from the rest in God's economy. He was in the good land and had a portion of it, and he should have remained there. Remaining in the good land

that God has promised and given is the real rest. Elimelech foolishly swerved from this wonderful rest.

A. Israel Living in the God-promised Land for the Carrying Out of God's Economy

Israel, as God's elect, was living in the God-promised land for the carrying out of God's economy. This means that staying in the good land is not just for us to earn a living but for us to participate in the carrying out of God's economy.

B. Israel's Rest Being Related to Their Situation with God in His Economy

Israel's rest, their prosperity for their enjoyment and their contentment, was related to their situation with God in His economy. For an Israelite to leave the good land meant that he was cutting himself off from God's eternal economy.

The book of Ruth speaks of Christ being brought into mankind through incarnation. This is the real rest. Ruth is thus a book of rest. As we will see, after Ruth married Boaz, they brought forth a child, Obed, and Ruth enjoyed a rest with an absolute satisfaction and full expectation for her descendants. The following generations enjoyed rest under David. Then after one thousand years, they enjoyed the real rest with the Lord Jesus. Two thousand years later, this rest will be enjoyed in a fuller way in the millennial kingdom with Christ as the King. After the millennium, the enjoyment of this rest will consummate in the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth for eternity. This matter of rest is the key to the book of Ruth.

C. From Bethlehem in Judah

Elimelech's mistake was to swerve from the ground, the standing, which gave him the opportunity to enjoy the rest in the good land. He swerved from Bethlehem in Judah.

1. Bethlehem, the City of David

Bethlehem, the city of David, was designated as the birthplace of the coming Christ (Micah 5:2; Luke 2:4-7). In the eyes of God, Bethlehem was a very special place, for it was the place where He, through incarnation, would be born to be a man.

2. Judah

Judah was the land of the royal tribe among Israel (Gen. 49:8-10). Of all the tribes, no tribe had a higher allotment of the land than Judah. It was the top part of the God-promised land (Exo. 3:8b), the top part of the good land (Deut. 8:7-10), and the top part of the land of Immanuel (Isa. 8:8). How mistaken Elimelech was in swerving from this land!

D. To Moab

Elimelech swerved from Bethlehem in Judah to Moab, a place of incest rejected and condemned by God. Moab was a country of the descendants of Lot through his incest (Gen. 19:30-38). It was also a country of the people who were not allowed to enter into the assembly of Jehovah because of the incest of their forefathers (Deut. 23:2-3) and because of their mistreatment of Israel (v. 4). Furthermore, Moab was a country of people whose peace and prosperity God would not allow Israel to seek all their days forever (v. 6). Finally, Moab was a country of idolatry (Judg. 10:6).

E. In the Days of the Rule of the Judges

Elimelech left in the days of the rule of the judges, under Israel's forsaking of God and under their degradation, confusion, and corruption.

F. Due to a Famine in the Good Land

Elimelech left due to a famine in the good land, a lacking of life supply for living and satisfaction as a punishment of God (Lev. 26:26; Ezek. 14:13). We may wonder how there could be a famine in the good land since God had promised that it would be a land flowing with milk and honey. God sent a famine to His people as a serious punishment. He punished them by stopping their food supply. Because they had forsaken Him as their source and Husband and had gone to idols, He let them go to their idols for food as well. There was no food from God and no food from the illegal husband of their harlotry.

G. With His Wife and Two Sons

Elimelech left the good land with his wife and two sons, who were good for the increase of the kingdom of God.

H. God's Chastisement in Moab over the House of Elimelech

Ruth 1:3 and 5 speak of God's chastisement over the house of Elimelech. Elimelech was punished by God with death upon himself and his two sons. This left his wife, Naomi, as a widow with two daughters-in-law in a foreign country. That was the pitiful result of Elimelech's swerving from the rest in God's eternal economy.

----- [SECTION 3] -----

II. NAOMI'S RETURNING TO THE REST IN GOD'S ECONOMY

In verses 4 through 7 and 19 through 22 we see Naomi's returning to the rest in God's economy.

A. From Moab

Naomi returned from Moab, the country of idolatry.

B. To Judah

Naomi returned to Judah, the land of Immanuel.

C. Having Been Stripped by God of Her Husband and of Her Two Sons

Naomi returned because she had been stripped by God first of her husband and then of her two sons, leaving her and her two daughters-in-law as widows without children (vv. 5, 20-21). Naomi returned also because she had heard that Jehovah had visited His people by giving them food (v. 6). In the Lord's recovery, we also have experienced the Lord's merciful visitation. During the last several years He has blessed us and supplied us with rich food.

D. With Ruth, Her Daughter-in-law

Naomi returned with Ruth, her daughter-in-law given to her by God for the accomplishment of His economy concerning Christ (v. 22a).

E. Arriving at Bethlehem

Naomi arrived at Bethlehem, the birthplace of the coming Christ (vv. 19a, 22b).

F. All the City Being Stirred

All the city was stirred because of Naomi and Ruth, and the women said, “Is this Naomi?” (v. 19b). Naomi said to them, “Do not call me Naomi [meaning ‘my pleasantness’]; call me Mara [meaning ‘bitterness’]; for the All-sufficient One has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, but Jehovah has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, when Jehovah has afflicted me and the All-sufficient One has dealt harshly with me?” (vv. 20-21).

III. RUTH’S CHOOSING FOR HER GOAL

In verses 8 through 18 we have an account of Ruth’s choosing for her goal.

A. Naomi’s Proposal to Her Two Daughters-in-law for Their Future

Naomi made a proposal to her two daughters-in-law for their future. She said to them, “Go and return, each of you, to your mother’s house. May Jehovah deal kindly with you, just as you have dealt with the dead and with me. May Jehovah grant you to find rest, each of you in the house of your husband” (vv. 8-9a). Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voice and wept, saying to her, “No, we will return with you to your people” (vv. 9b-10). Naomi told them to return and then asked them, “Why should you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Return, my daughters, go; for I am too old to have a husband. If I said, I have hope; even if I had a husband tonight and even bore sons; would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from having a husband? No, my daughters; it has been far more bitter for me than it should be for you, for the hand of Jehovah has gone forth against me” (vv. 11-13). When the daughters-in-law heard this, they lifted up their voice and wept again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. Naomi said to Ruth, “Your sister-in-law has now returned to her people and to her gods; return with your sister-in-law” (vv. 14-15).

B. Ruth’s Choosing to Go with Naomi

Ruth said to Naomi, “Do not entreat me to leave you and turn away from following after you. For wherever you go, I will go, and wherever you dwell, I will dwell; and your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. Where you die, I will die; and there will I be buried. Jehovah do so to me, and more as well, if anything but death parts me from you” (vv. 16-17). When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she ceased speaking to her about it (v. 18).

Ruth chose the goal of participating with God’s elect in the enjoyment of Christ, and she even became a top ancestor of Christ who helped bring forth Christ into mankind. This was more than just a resolution on the part of the Moabite widow; it was a goal, a choosing. Ruth chose God and His kingdom for the carrying out of God’s economy concerning Christ. Hallelujah for such a goal and for such a person choosing this goal!