

Marks of Discipleship

Daily Prayer ■ Weekly Worship ■ Bible Reading
Giving Time, Talents & Resources ■ Spiritual
Friendships ■ Service In & Beyond the Church

July 16, 2023

Day 1: Ruth 1:1-2

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there.

One of the ironies of this story is that the name Bethlehem means “house of bread.” The region around Bethlehem must have been in a real desperate state for the family to leave their land. Many scholars believe that the account of Ruth takes place at the end of the time of the Judges. By the end of Judges Israel is in a state of chaos and even the last of the judges are less than honorable. It is a biblical principle that if the people are fallen away from God then even the land will suffer. To the ears of Israelites, Moab would represent evil and a place of death and destruction. Yet Elimelech is so desperate that he takes his family to that place.

Question: Look at an ancient map and see how far it was from Bethlehem to the country of Moab. How do you think they traveled?

Challenge: What would it take for you to pick up your family and move?

Scripture: Ruth 1

Day 2: Ruth 1:3-6

But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives; the name of one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. When they had lived there for about ten years, both Mahlon and Chilion also died, so that the woman was left without her two sons or her husband. Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the Lord had had consideration for his people and given them food.

What Naomi heard was that the drought around Bethlehem had ended and the land was once again plentiful. The family had migrated to Moab to find life but instead their hopes for the future were dashed. Naomi followed her husband into what she thought was a new life. As it turned out it was the end of her future. Now she goes back without any thought of a future for herself or family.

Question: What do you think Elimelech did for a living in Moab? Did he hire out for farming or have a trade or what do you think he did? How about the sons - what did they do for a living?

Challenge: Think about a time you traveled to find a future? What happened?

Scripture: Ruth 2

Day 3: Ruth 1:8-10

But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, ‘Go back each of you to your mother’s house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The Lord grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband.’ Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud. They said to her, ‘No, we will return with you to your people.

Going back to their “mother’s house” is equivalent to saying “you are young enough - go and look for new husbands and a new future.” Naomi believes that she will have no husband, no children and no future, so the girls should not go with her. Both of the girls have been very kind to Naomi.

Question: Why did Naomi tell the girls to go to their mother’s house and not their father’s?

Challenge: What was the kindness the girls showed Naomi?

Scripture: Ruth 3

Day 4: Ruth 1:11-13

But Naomi said, ‘Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the Lord has turned against me.’

Naomi has reason on her side. In those days your future was in your children. If there were not male children the line would die out and be forgotten.

Question: Why did she think the Lord had turned against her? Maybe it was just circumstances or bad luck.

Challenge: Do you ever worry that your family line will die out?

Scripture: Ruth 4

Day 5: Ruth 1:14-15

Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. So she said, ‘See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.

Naomi is indeed in bad shape and has no hope. She advises the girls to go back to their own gods because she doubts her God will be of any help.

Question: It is speculation - but why do you think Ruth wants to follow Naomi?

Challenge: What could you say to or do for Naomi to give her some hope?

Scripture: Jonah 1 and 2

Day 6: Ruth 1:16-18

But Ruth said, ‘Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people and your God my God. Where you die, I will die— there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!’ When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

Ruth’s speech shows a quality of God that humans can display in a lesser form. It is love and loyalty above what is normal or expected. Ruth is not swayed by Naomi’s sadness but is willing to go and seek a future in a foreign land with people who most likely will not receive her well. Ruth displays faith. We, as followers of Christ, put our future in the hand of the one we know as Jesus, the Lord.

Question: Do you think that Ruth has taken on the Jewish faith?

Challenge: What would make it hard for people to be followers of Jesus?

Scripture: Jonah 3-4