Commentary on Ruth 1:8-18

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Series*) for **Sunday**, **August 14, 2011**, is from **Ruth 1:8-18**. Five **Questions for Discussion** follow the *Bible Lesson Commentary* below.

(Ruth 1:8) 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.

Naomi, her husband, Elimelech, and her two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, migrated to Moab (the country of the descendants of the eldest son of Lot) for economic reasons. Her sons married Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth, but her sons died in Moab before they fathered any children. Elimelech also died in Moab. So, Naomi determined to return to her home in Bethlehem in Judah. She told Orpah and Ruth to go back to their homes, because there they might find new husbands. These women had loved and cared for one another, and Naomi appreciated all her daughters-in-law had done for her.

(Ruth 1:9) 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.

Having lost all of the men in her family, security became a primary concern to Naomi. She could find some security in her old homeland among her neighbors and relatives, where the Law of God made provision for widows. She wanted her beloved daughters-in-law to find security too in finding new husbands. Naomi had lost her husband and two sons in death, and her faith in God was badly shaken. In spite of this, for the sake of her daughters-in-law, she was willing to part from them for what she thought would be for their benefit.

(Ruth 1:10) They said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people."

Because they loved one another and her daughters-in-law cared for her, they resolved to return with her and live with her people. It was for her sake that they would leave their homeland. The Israelites and Moabites had been enemies from time to time, and the Moabites had oppressed the Israelites as part of the judgment of God (see Judges 3:12-30). Orpah and Ruth could be made to feel very uncomfortable and unwanted in Judah.

(Ruth 1:11) 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?

True love for them moved Naomi to think of what was best for her "daughters," not just her "daughters-in-law." True loved for her motivated them to think of

what was best for her. They wanted one another to be happy and secure. Naomi knew that no more sons would be born to her and come of age for her daughters-in law, and so she thought it best that they return to their homeland to find new husbands.

(Ruth 1:12) 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,

Naomi had experienced so much hardship and sorrow that even though she had taught her daughters-in-law much about the LORD and His people and His Law, she herself had lost a great deal of her faith in God's ability or willingness to provide for her and them anywhere. She continued to think that security for women rested in having husbands, rather than in the LORD.

(Ruth 1:13) 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 continued to argue based on her inability to provide security or husbands for Orpah and Ruth. She had not only lost the ability to trust in the LORD herself, but had also lost the ability to inspire trust in the LORD in others. She felt that the LORD had turned against her, and she did not want Orpah and Ruth to suffer along with her. With the sudden and unexpected deaths of her husband and sons, she may have felt that for some reason God was punishing her family, perhaps for their fleeing to Moab to escape God's discipline of His people, but people cannot flee and escape God's discipline (as Jonah discovered).

(Ruth 1:14) Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

Once again they mourn their losses, and now the loss of parting from each other. Orpah was persuaded by her mother-in-law's reasoning (based on a lack of faith), and she returned to the possible security of her Moabite home. On the other hand, Ruth loved Naomi and had come to faith in the true God, probably from what she had learned about God from Naomi and her husband. Ruth did not want her mother-in-law to lose all visible means of support, and she wanted to give Naomi the sense of security she had lost and now so desperately needed.

(Ruth 1:15) 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 used another argument to try to convince Ruth to leave her by saying that Orpah had left to return home and to trust in the Moabite idols. She argued that Ruth should follow the example of Orpah, which was the reasonable (from lack of faith in the true God) thing to do. Naomi's faith and trust in the LORD was so

weak that she seemed to commend Orpah for returning to idol worship for security.

(Ruth 1:16) 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.

Unlike Naomi, Ruth expressed her faith and total commitment to the LORD God. Her faith in the true God moved her to commit herself to caring for Naomi wherever she lodged, trusting that the LORD would care for them both. She trusted that the LORD God would be their security and give them the security they both sought. She would believe in the true God and become as Naomi's people and worship the LORD as the true God. God would be their ultimate security, and she would serve the LORD and Naomi according to the Law of God.

(Ruth 1:17) 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!"

Naomi learned from Ruth that she could be counted on even until death, and Ruth became the security of God that God provided for Naomi through Ruth. Ruth trusted that the LORD would give her life, health, and strength to care for Naomi as long as Naomi lived. Ruth expressed the kind of faith in the LORD that she had learned through Naomi, and when Naomi became weak in her faith, Ruth helped Naomi come to a stronger faith.

(Ruth 1:18) When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

There does come a time when argument must cease; Naomi saw that the time had come to submit to Ruth and her commitment to help her and go with her. She accepted Ruth's declaration of faith in the true God as sincere trust and did not try to discourage her with another listing of her troubles or feelings of abandonment by God.

Five Questions for Discussion

1. Where did Naomi and her family seek security? After their husbands died, what did she advise Orpah and Ruth to do in order to find security? What did Naomi intend to do to find security?

2. Where and how do many people seek security today? What can happen to someone if they misplace their security?

3. Reread Ruth 3:15. In what ways is Naomi's recommendation to Ruth the very opposite of what she should have recommended and what she needed to do?

4. Why do you think Ruth knew what to do?

5. What part of Ruth's reply to Naomi means the most to you? Why?

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