

The Story of Fullness and Emptiness

Լեցունութեան եւ Պարապութեան Պատմութիւնը

Ruth 1:1-15

Our main topic is *Hesed*, God's loyal love towards His creation.

We examined **Jonah's** life and mission trip. We found how Jonah escaped, and God chased him. Eventually, Jonah obeyed God, and the people repented. Jonah was not pleased with the situation. However, God did not give up from him. The dialogue continued between God and Jonah, and the story never came to an end.

Sometimes God gives us assignments that we don't like, or we think no one cares about that mission. Two weeks ago, one of our church treasurers who regularly writes a column in our publication Pilgrim's Progress, decided not to write her column, and just present the monthly thermometer indicating our church income. The person said, "Every month I write a short essay based on the Word of God. I am not sure if anyone ever reads it."

After the Sunday service (May 30), she meets a parishioner who approaches and greets her and tells her how much she looks forward every month to see what she wrote in the Pilgrim's Progress. Our treasurer says to me, "God clearly revealed His will to me." And she wrote it. Please read it in our Pilgrim's Progress (June 2021).

Here we are examining another book from the Bible: the book of **Ruth**. It is not a book of prophecy like Jonah. The best way scholars describe it is that it is an **edifying short story**.¹ We don't know the author, and that is fine. Beside edifying lessons that one learns from the main characters, Ruth, Naomi and Boaz, there is a genealogy in chapter 4:18-22, which brings forth the Davidic monarchy (the genealogy of David, and that means eventually that of Christ.) We will see the sovereign God working and directing people towards His will.

-We have female characters whose lives have moral lessons. In the Bible, we don't have too many female characters, or prophets. Ruth is one of them. Remember the biblical time was a patriarchal time, so having a book in the name of Ruth is significant.

God is teaching them and us about **his Love**, *hesed*. “THE CONCEPT OF *hesed* is important to understanding the book of Ruth since it is used to describe both secular and divine-human relationships.”²

-Emptiness and Fullness

The book is full of images of **fullness and emptiness**. For example, we have an abundant life: a woman with a husband and two sons. Famine hits, and the house becomes empty. Ironically, they are from Bethlehem (“house of bread” “house of food”).

Here in Moab, they find food, also two new brides. It is a full house again. Right? Well, tragedy hits, and all three men die (emptiness).

The “pleasant” Naomi becomes the “bitter” Mara. Let me explain.

In the middle of chapter one, Naomi comes back to Bethlehem after 10 years. She comes back to **Bethlehem** (*house of bread*) in the time of harvest (*fullness*). There is repentance in the people of Israel and God has restored back the land.

“It is abundantly clear that the writer of the book of Ruth uses space, time, and circumstance to build the central message of the book—Naomi’s restoration from emptiness to fullness through the selfless acts of loyal love (*hesed*) by Ruth and Boaz.”³

Let us start reading and digging in the book.

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. (Ruth 1:1 NIV11)

The book is written in the **days of the Judges**, the period when Israel was ruled by judges. This verse already draws the contrast between a rough, violent, moral and spiritual decay versus the book of Ruth which will bring forth new life (empty vs full).

In the book of Judges one can find **cycles**:

1. There will be relative peace with one another;
2. they disobey God; they fall in adultery, apostasy, they sin;
3. that leads to God’s judgment;
4. and the judgment can begin with the turning off the rainfall, or their borders will be buffeted (struck, pounded);
5. then people start praying to God in repentance;
6. and God sends them a charismatic figure called a judge;

7. and the judge drives the enemies away brings about deliverance and that leads to peace again.

In the book of **Judges**, we see this cycle **seven times**.

Thus coming back to the book of the **Ruth**, we read that there was a famine in the land, which means they are under the **judgment of God**.

They should turn to God in prayer. Naomi's family too should repent and turn to God.

(Show the Map)

They decide to go to a foreign land. In Armenian we say, ուր հաց հոն կայց (*We will go wherever we find bread*). In the context of the Old Testament, this was a bad decision. Yahweh's command was not to be in relationship with foreign people, with foreign gods, customs, religions and so on... They left Bethlehem in Judah and moved to the foreign land of Moab (Jordan).

-Names of the Family

² The man's name was Elimelek, his wife's name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from

Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there. (Ruth 1:12 NIV11)

Biblical names have meanings, and they indicate how God is working in their lives.

The husband's name is **Elimelek**, which means "**my God is King**"; here I find another contrast; they are living in times of Judges, this is a time when there was **no king** in Israel and everyone did what was right in his own eyes. How interesting that the parents named this child **Elimelek**, my God is KING.

Naomi means "**my delight**" "**my pleasantness**" "**pleasant one**".

Two sons: **Mahlon** means "failing", **Kilion** means "sickly".

We had two brides: **Orpah** means "**neck, presents beauty**" and **Ruth** means: "**friendship**".

We find God's providence over these people, especially Naomi and Ruth. Amazing story.

Tragedy after Tragedy

³ Now Elimelek, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. ⁴ They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, ⁵ both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

(Ruth 1:3-5 NIV11)

What a tragedy. They are in a foreign land. I don't think it was Naomi's decision to live there. I assume Elimelek made the decision, and everyone followed him. They are already uprooted. Naomi loses her husband, and life continues. Now her sons are going to marry Moabite girls. Another big NO from Yahweh.

Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, ⁴ for they will turn your children away from following me to serve other gods, and the LORD's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you. (Deut. 7:3,4 NIV11)

The family grew by having new two brides (emptiness and fullness.) For 10 years it seems they were doing fine, but as you realize there are no children. Two of Naomi's sons die. Tragedy after tragedy (fullness now emptiness).

-Return to Bethlehem

⁶ When Naomi heard in Moab that the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. ⁷ With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.

⁸ Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the LORD show you kindness (*hesed*), as you have shown kindness (*hesed*) to your dead husbands and to me. ⁹ May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband."

Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud ¹⁰ and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people." (Ruth 1:6-10 NIV11)

As you read in verse 6, please notice how things have changed in Israel. They have repented and turned to God. (**The Lord, Yahweh, had come to the aid**).

We are in the cycle of repentance and restoration. There is rain, there is food in Israel.

Naomi decides to return with daughters-in-law, and they are on the road.

Then we see a shift here. She gave them the **freedom** to return to their home and culture. She also gave her **blessing** that each of them would find a new husband.

We see the word **hesed** is being used. "May God Yahweh reveal **hesed (kindness, loyal love)** to you as you have shown to my family". That is a good attitude from the mother-in-law.

Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud ¹⁰ and said to her, “We will go back with you to your people.” (10)

-Naomi Going Home Alone

But Naomi said, “Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? ¹² Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons— ¹³ would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD’s hand has turned against me!”

¹⁴ At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

¹⁵ “Look,” said Naomi, “your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.” (Ruth 1:11-15 NIV)

Naomi lacks male provision, no husband, no sons. It is the male-dominated, ancient Near East. She is in Moab, which makes it worse, a foreign land. Also, her age will not allow her to have another son for the family to continue. She is poor, and she is not sure how she will survive. The logical thing is to send the brides to their families. I give her credit that she did not think **selfishly** by keeping them with her. She gave them the freedom to go back to their families. That means she will travel home alone.

Orpah decided to go back to the parents’ home.

But Ruth is another story. The verse 14 says: “but Ruth clung to her (Naomi)”

The verb is *dābaq* which literally means **to glue. (to cling, to stay close)**

Do you remember her name? Ruth: Friendship.

What a commitment. This is the same verb used in marriage.

Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. (Gen 2:24 KJV)

A strong commitment from Ruth towards her mother-in-law.

We will continue next week.

Application:

1. Commit to God in all circumstances.

Yes, there was famine, and the situation was bad. Elimelek (my God is King) had a choice to believe that his God is the KING who provides.

“God expected his people to live according to his Word in the land he had given them and not to go and live in another land when difficult times arose.”⁴

-When we face trials and hardship, where do we go?

-Earthly solutions are not necessarily God’s solutions.

-I have witnessed this in my life. My logical solutions ended up wrong. I am not saying do not use logic. I am saying our decisions should not contradict with God’s will for us. God has revealed His will in His Word. Also, God will reveal His will to you daily in your walk with Him.

What was God saying to Elimelek’s family?

What is God saying to our family now?

Did they seek Yahweh’s will when they moved to Moab?

Did they seek God’s will when the boys decided to get married? One led to the other...Move to Moab, of course your will find Moabite girls....

I ask the same question to all of us. **Seek His will first, seek His Kingdom first...**

the rest will come into place.... Believe me. I have witnessed this in my life often.

-We find Ruth not following the logical steps that Naomi asked her to do.

She glued herself to Naomi. It seems 10 years living with Naomi, she has witnessed who Yahweh is. She decided to stay. We will discuss next week how God is leading her towards a big plan. She is not even aware of it.

2. Tragedies will hit our home, let us not blame God for it.

Naomi felt she was being punished by God. Let us be careful not to blame God when tragedies come and hit Elimelek’s home. It was not Naomi’s choice to move there. I don’t know it was her choice if the sons wanted to marry Moabite women.

Tragedy, after tragedy.

Some people try to blame themselves for tragedies that are not caused by their choices. Now, we also create our tragedies as well.

We will see that God’s *hesed*, loyal love, unconditional love, His mercy and kindness will bring fullness in their empty life.

God is sovereign God. Like Job who trusted God, I will continue to trust God in my tragedies. It is easier to say than to live it. I pray that I will cling to God more and more when tragedies hit my home.

That is my prayer for you.

Amen

1. K. Lawson Younger Jr, *NIV Application Commentary (Judges/Ruth)*. P 397
2. *ibid* P 393
3. *ibid* p 398
4. *ibid* p 429