

Life Lesson 55
Elimelech and Naomi
Text: Ruth 1

Introduction

Today we're beginning a new book, the book of Ruth. It follows the book of Judges and that's when it takes place, during the time of the judges. We don't know for sure, but most people think that Gideon was the judge during the time of our story.

The Story

There lived in the land of Israel a man named Elimelech. The name "Elimelech" means "God is my king." That's a pretty good name to have, isn't it? His wife's name was Naomi, which means "pleasant." They had two sons named Mahlon and Chilion. Their names meant "puny" and "sickly" so they were evidently not very healthy.

In Bible days parents didn't name their children just any name that sounded nice. They were named for a purpose. Sometimes their names were changed as they themselves changed and showed different character traits. Maybe "Puny" and "Sickly" started out as "Strong" and "Healthy."

From Elimelech's name we can gather that he was one of the few people during those wicked times who still loved and served God. After all, that's what salvation is all about. We step down from the throne of our lives and surrender to the Lord. He becomes the King of our lives. We do what God says because He is our boss. Since He loves us and knows exactly what is best for us, we can trust Him to lead us in the very best way.

Do you think that people who love God still make mistakes? Yes, they do! Very often

they make the mistake of forgetting that God is the king. They start worrying about things that are the king's business, not their own. That's what Elimelech did.

Even though his name meant "God is my King" we see that Elimelech didn't trust God to take care of him when things became tough. He took control back into his own hands, and that led to big trouble.

You see, there was a famine in the land. Perhaps it was during the time the Midianites burned and stole all the crops and animals they could find. At any rate, there wasn't enough food to go around.

Do you think it would have been hard for God to feed His people? Of course not! Didn't He feed them on manna in the wilderness for all those years? Yet, Elimelech was afraid that his king wasn't able to care for him and his family. He packed up and moved into the land of Moab where there was more food.

When we begin to doubt God and try to take things into our own hands, we get into trouble every time! That's what happened to Elimelech.

He moved his sons into a pagan country where the people worshiped idols. The people there even offered their little children as sacrifices to the horrible idol, Chemosh. All the girls there were idol worshipers. So who do you think Mahlon and Chilion married? Pagan Moabite girls. That's just what God told them not to do.

More trouble came for Elimelech and his family. Elimelech died in that foreign country, never seeing his home again. Then his two sons died, leaving poor Naomi all alone.

She decided to go back to her home country, the land of Israel. She kissed her two daughters-in-law goodbye. They walked with her as she started her trip.

“We don’t want to go back to our families. We’ll go with you,” they said.

”No,” Naomi said. “You need to stay here in your own country and find new husbands. I’m too old to have any more sons for you to marry and no one else would want to marry a foreigner. Go on back to your home.”

Orpah cried, but she went back to the land of Moab. She went back to her people and to her god, Chemosh.

Ruth refused to go back.

“Entreat me not to leave thee,” Ruth said, “or to return from following after thee. For whither thou goest, I will go: and where thou lodgest (where you live) I will lodge: thy people shall be my people and thy God, my God.”

She was willing to give up all her security, her hope of ever marrying again. She was giving up her friends, her family, and her religion. She was doing more than just going along with Naomi. She was saying that she was surrendering to Naomi’s God, the true God. Now God would be her king.

When they returned to Bethlehem, things had changed. It was harvest time and there was plenty of food – for people who owned land, that is. Ruth and Naomi were poor and had no husband to care for them. In those days women didn’t get jobs and support themselves. They didn’t have welfare, either.

God had a plan for His people to provide for the poor, though. The people who owned grain fields were to leave plenty behind when they harvested the crops. Poor people would go behind the reapers and gather the extra that was left behind.

Ruth went out and gathered with the reapers so that she and Naomi would have food to

eat. The adventures she encountered there will be our story for next week.

The Life Lesson

Is God your king? Do you obey Him, or do you rule your own life? Maybe you are a Christian, but you've acted like Elimelech. Maybe you have taken things into your own hands again. That doesn't mean you aren't saved anymore. It just means you are headed for trouble, like Elimelech was.

Our God is a wonderful God. He loves us and will always give us exactly what we need. When He is on the throne of our lives, we have nothing at all to fear.

Review Questions

When did the story of Ruth take place?

In the time of the judges.

What does Elimelech mean?

God is my king

What did Elimelech do when there was a famine in the land?

He moved his family to Moab.

What god did the Moabites worship?

Chemosh

Who did Mahlon and Chileon marry?

Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth.

What happened to Elimelech, Mahlon, and Chileon in Moab?

They died in Moab.

What happened to Naomi?

She went back to Israel.

What happened to Orpah and Ruth?

Orpah went back to her people and her god. Ruth went with Naomi.