

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DAUGHTERS- IN-LAW AND MOTHERS-IN-LAW

GOLDEN TEXT

“But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God”. (Ruth 1:16)

USEFUL PRACTICE

The Christian faith exalts family love and, more specifically, respect and honor between daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law, as well as sons-in-law and fathers-in-law.

SCRIPTURE READING

Ruth 1:1-5, 8, 12-14

1 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.

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.

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.

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, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me.

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.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

I) To present the context of the socioeconomic crisis in Judea, in addition to the family drama caused by the mourning of Naomi and Ruth;

II) To identify that the union of faith between the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law was crucial for overcoming the adversities inherent in life;

III) To reflect on how, by honoring her mother-in-law, Ruth bore good fruits for the whole family, even reverberating through the lineage of the Messiah;

IV) To emphasize God's blessings from the relationship between daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law.

INTRODUCTION

In this lesson, we will study one of the most beautiful Bible stories in which the love and virtue of the Moabite named Ruth is exalted. It is the story of a family drama that involves mourning, subsistence and hopelessness. It is a widespread crisis of poverty, illness, widowhood and death. However, in this family drama, Ruth's obstinacy stands out, as she was able to overcome difficulties with attitudes of faith, intelligence, loyalty, persistence and hope. It is the biblical narrative of a daughter-in-law who kept true love for her mother-in-law in her heart and, therefore, was able to face the crisis

of scarcity in an inhospitable land, far from her people of origin. We have a lot to learn from the biblical account of the relationship between Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi.

I - THE ECONOMIC CRISIS IN THE LAND OF JUDEA

1. The scarcity that brought about famine in the “house of bread” (Ruth 1:1).

The basic food of the families that lived in the Judean region was scarce because of the bad governance of the last judges of Israel, who abandoned the Lord. The city of Bethlehem, Naomi and her husband Elimelek had left behind, was the place that had formerly faced drought and famine. Well, the word Bethlehem means “house of bread”, but the “city of bread” was without the bread that represented the material sustenance of the people. The city went from being a granary to being a place of poverty and famine, scarcity and drought throughout the land of Canaan. In the Bible, famine is sometimes God's way of disciplining people who have sinned against Him (Lev. 26:18-20). At that time, Israel had walked away from fellowship with God and even worshiped pagan idols. As a matter of fact, not everyone acted likewise, but discipline was for everyone.

2. A family in crisis (Rt 1.1-3).

The family referred to in the book of Ruth consisted of Elimelek, Naomi, the sons Mahlon and Kilion, while they were in Judea. An economic crisis forced Elimelek to make a decision for a solution to the family's livelihood elsewhere. Instead of sitting by, he took the path that seemed to be the most rational, the path through the flat lands of Moab. Elimelek knew the Lord, but he did not seek Him before making that important decision. Upon arriving in Moab, the challenge was not easy. There, in Moab, the family encountered death, mourning and widowhood that involved the life of that family when Elimelek died and Naomi became a widow with her two sons (Ruth 1:3a). The marriage of her two sons to two Moabite women brought hope back to Naomi's heart (Ruth 1:3b). But, suddenly, the two sons passed away, leaving their wives widowed (Ruth 1:5). Now there were three widows who, in the context of the time, would face an uphill struggle to survive. This story shows us that a family can be in the center of profound suffering, and that this can affect the relationships of very close people such as daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law, sons-in-law and fathers-in-law. How to behave in such circumstances?

II - OVERCOMING EXISTENTIAL CRISES

1. Naomi decides to return to her land (Ruth 1:6-8).

Widowed with her two Moabite daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, also widows, Naomi decides to return to her homeland in Judea after 10 years away (Ruth 1:4). She was an old woman and, therefore, decided to release her daughters-in-law Orpah and Ruth to return to their families of origin in Moab. Orpah accepted her mother-in-law's release and went back to her family, but Ruth decided to stay with Naomi (Ruth 1:15-18). Probably, Naomi thought that God was punishing her with all the suffering she was going through, and she did not imagine the divine plan in all those circumstances. In Ruth's decision, a deep friendship was born between a daughter-in-law and a mother-in-law, between two women who would be tested through suffering. We learn from the apostle Paul that "in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28 – NIV).

2. Ruth knows the God of her mother-in-law (Ruth 1:16).

Ruth sincerely declared to her mother-in-law Naomi, "Your people will be my people and your God my God" (Ruth 1:16). She had an exemplary gesture of love towards Naomi. Living with her mother-in-law led Ruth to know the God of Naomi. Despite the sufferings and needs experienced within that family, the Moabite discovered that the God of her mother-in-law was the true God, who meets our needs (Phil. 4:19). Ruth became close to Naomi, not only because of family ties, but also because of her faith in the God of Israel as her mother-in-law set the example of a God-fearing woman. When mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law are united in the presence of God, it is a blessing for the whole family. Through this union, God provides for the family's needs greatly.

3. United against the crisis. Every family can go through a period when it seems that there is no prospect for change in the face of a difficult situation. As in the case of Naomi, sometimes the family seems to come to "a dead end" on its material, emotional and even spiritual life. To some extent, this is natural, because when we are faced with certain crises, our vision tends to become blurred and limited. However, God's Word says, "What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31). God is for his people. The same goes for our house. God's providence can begin in the relationship among family members. Now, at the time of a family crisis, the last thing that can happen is a "war" between its members. Can you imagine how much heavier the burden of Naomi and Ruth would be if they were not united? Yes, Ruth, Naomi's daughter-in-law, was able to overcome the crises in her house, and in her mother-in-law's house, with a vision of hope, patience and tenacity to overcome all the family's difficulties. Her faith perspective

encouraged her mother-in-law, and together they saw God's work on behalf of their family.

III - FAITH AND WORK IN A NEW PERSPECTIVE

1. The arrival in the land of bread (Ruth 1:19). The arrival of the two widowed women in Judea, more specifically in Bethlehem, after 10 years, caused a commotion in the city (Ruth 1:19). Naomi's former acquaintances wanted to know what had happened to her family. She was still a woman embittered by the hard experiences she had gone through in Moab and preferred to be called "Marah", whose Hebrew meaning is "bitter" (Ex 15:23). Her complaint boiled down to declaring that God seemed to have abandoned her. However, the Lord was in charge of her life for a greater purpose than she could have imagined. Her humiliation and sadness began to turn into joy. So when Naomi and Ruth undertook their journey to Judea, there was new hope in their hearts. Ruth had become a woman of faith, willing to overcome the subsistence crisis, trusting entirely in the God of her mother-in-law. So, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law are now together living by faith, as the Bible says: "The righteous will live by faith" (Hab. 2:4; Rom 1:17).

2. Recovering self-esteem (Ruth 1:15-18). Ruth gave a show of affection and love for Naomi that made her understand that there was still hope. They had arrived in Bethlehem "as the barley harvest was beginning" (Ruth 1:22). If in Moab the situation was precarious, in Bethlehem there was hope that both of them would "lack nothing". Ruth used her insight to meet the need of the house (Ruth 2:2). This attitude helped Naomi to improve her state of mind and self-esteem. It is very important when there are people in the family who are willing to encourage others.

3. The honor for work in the field of Boaz (Ruth 2:8-17). There was a field belonging to a relative of Elimelek named Boaz (Ruth 2:1). Ruth went to that barley field in order to pick up the leftover grain that the reapers left behind, a practice permitted and granted to the poor by the Mosaic Law (Deuteronomy 24:19-21). Thus, Ruth was willing to work for her support and that of her mother-in-law, Naomi (Ruth 2:7). She was hardworking and persistent, and was not afraid to take risks (Ruth 2:2); she was determined and willing to achieve her goal. Later, upon discovering the generosity of that foreigner towards her mother-in-law, Boaz offered his field, his protection and became the provider for Naomi and Ruth.

IV - RUTH DISCOVERS THE FAMILY'S REDEEMER

1. Ruth discovers Naomi's redeemer (Ruth 4:1-9). When she made

herself ready to pick up the leftover grain left behind by Boaz's employees, Ruth finds out that he was a relative of Elimelek and, therefore, according to the law, Boaz could redeem that inheritance, so that it would stay within the family and the widow would no longer be destitute. He carried out all the legal procedures regarding the property. Here, we can see that Boaz is a type of Christ, our Redeemer, who, being rich, became poor to make us heirs of his spiritual riches (2 Cor. 8:9). There are riches of Christ for our family.

2. Boaz redeems Ruth the Moabite (Ruth 4:11-13). Boaz went to the city gate, where the elders of the people were meeting, like a jury, who judged the causes of the people. The redeemer by right was another man, because that part of the land, which belonged to Elimelek, was for sale. Therefore, the inheritance represented by that piece of land belonged to another person, but Boaz was willing to marry Ruth so that that land would be his, convincing the elders and the former owner to do so. More than that, Boaz would redeem Ruth, paying the price of that land and the widow's right of redemption. This is how Ruth, the Moabite woman, entered the genealogy of Jesus (Matt. 1:5). After marrying Boaz, she gave birth to a son, who was named Obed, the father of Jesse; and the latter, the father of David, the great king of Israel (Ruth 4:13, 17). When Jesus was manifested on Earth, he became known as the "son of David" (Matt. 1:3-6), forming the links of the Messiah's lineage.

3. Daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law. The relationship between daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law has a lot to do with the balance of family relationships. If the relationship between them is not healthy, many other family relationships can be affected. The biblical story of Ruth and Naomi shows us that it is God's will that daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law, as well as sons-in-law and fathers-in-law, may have a relationship in which the fruit of the Spirit is revealed (Gal. 5:22-24). From the story of these two characters we learn that daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law can overcome, together, the pain of mourning, the period of scarcity that every family is subject to go through, the illness of a child or grandchild. In difficult times in the family, they can be a support for everyone. The Word of God says that we must do it all for the glory of the Lord, and the same thing goes for the closest relationships of Christians (1 Cor. 10:31).

CONCLUSION

The biblical story of Ruth is an example of faith in the relationship between a daughter-in-law and her mother-in-law. Even though she was a foreigner, Ruth was able to take care of her mother-in-law, showing great affection

and respect for her, in addition to managing huge losses within herself: her brother-in-law and her husband. But through it all, God honored her work by which she supported herself and Naomi's house. Therefore, God wants mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, as well as sons-in-law and fathers-in-law, to live together in unity so that the family may be richly blessed by the Lord.