

OT LESSON 20
**"ALL THE CITY . . . DOTHTH KNOW THAT THOU ART A
VIRTUOUS WOMAN"**

By Ted L. Gibbons

INTRODUCTION:

About fifty years ago, Mr. F. M. Bareham wrote the following:

"A century ago men were following with bated breath the march of Napoleon and waiting with feverish impatience for news of the wars. And all the while in their homes babies were being born. But who could think about babies? Everybody was thinking about battles.

"In one year between Trafalgar and Waterloo there stole into the world a host of heroes: Gladstone was born in Liverpool; Tennyson at the Somersby Rectory, and Oliver Wendell Holmes in Massachusetts. Abraham Lincoln was born in Kentucky, and music was enriched by the advent of Felix Mendelssohn in Hamburg."

And we might add, and Joseph Smith was born in Vermont, four years earlier.

Quoting Bareham further:

"But nobody thought of babies, everybody was thinking of battles. Yet which of the battles of 1809 mattered more than the babies of 1809? We fancy God can manage his world only with great battalions, when all the time he is doing it with beautiful babies.

"When a wrong wants righting, or a truth wants preaching, or a continent wants discovering, God sends a baby into the world to do it." (Spencer W. Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle*: pp, 84,85)

One of the messages of the Old Testament is that God prepares great mothers for great children. In this lesson we get an discerning look at three remarkable

Christians, who are women and mothers: Ruth, Naomi, and Hannah.

I wonder if the placement of these stories is coincidental. If we examine the final chapters of Judges together with Ruth and 1 Samuel 1, we find these evidences of greatness:

RUTH: THE ANCESTOR OF DAVID AND CHRIST

NAOMI: THE MOTHER-IN-LAW OF RUTH

HANNAH: THE MOTHER OF THE PROPHET SAMUEL

SAMSON: HE HAD BIG MUSCLES

In fact, the book of Ruth is a great contrast to the wickedness of Judges. Whether intended or not, there are great lessons here about the things that matter most.

1. RUTH LEAVES HER HOME TO GO TO BETHLEHEM WITH NAOMI.

[If you have not already done so, take a break now and read the book of Ruth and the 1st chapter of 1 Samuel. I will not spend much time here on the history, but you will need that background to truly understand what is being taught.]

Elimlech took his family to Moab for a decade. While there he died and his sons died. Naomi, wife and mother, was left with great sorrow. To her daughters-in-law she said, "the hand of the Lord is gone out against me" (Ruth 1:13).

Knowing that there was little in Israel for Moabite widows, Naomi encouraged her daughters to remain in Moab while she returned to her home in Bethlehem. Orpah agreed, but Ruth refused to leave Naomi. The content of Ruth suggests two reasons for this. First, she love Naomi, and would not send her away alone to a life without offspring or opportunity. Second, she had been converted to the God of Naomi.

And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me (Ruth 1:16,17).

Life is filled with opportunities to make choices about the things that matter most. Orpah chose family, friends, familiarity. Ruth chose love and faith. Consider this:

The adversary is delighted when we act like sightseers, meaning those who are hearers rather than doers of the word (see James 1:22), or shoppers, meaning those preoccupied with the vain things of this world that suffocate our spirits. Satan baits us with perishable pleasures and preoccupations--our bank accounts, our wardrobes, even our waistlines--for he knows that where our treasure is, there will our hearts be also (see Matt. 6:21). Unfortunately, it is easy to let the blinding glare of the adversary's enticements distract us from the light of Christ (Sherrie Dew, *Ensign*, Nov. 1999, p. 97).

Ruth would not be distracted by the "perishable pleasures." She left for Bethlehem with her mother-in-law.

Ruth's willingness to follow has been duplicated in the lives of so many wonderful women. Since my marriage I have lived in 12 homes. Each of them has been selected on the basis of my work and my requirements. My bride has never asked when we get to live where she wants to live. "Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge . . ." she said. And then she did.

When they returned to Bethlehem, there seems to have been a great outpouring of sympathy for them. "All the city was moved about them, and they said, is this Naomi?" (Ruth 1:19)

Naomi responded, "Call me not Naomi, call me Mara [the word means *bitter*]" (Ruth 1:20) . . . I went out full and the Lord hath brought me home again empty." Certainly life had dealt roughly with Naomi. It often does with all of us.

Just when all seems to be going right, challenges often come in multiple doses applied simultaneously. When those trials are not consequences of your disobedience, they are evidence that the Lord feels you are prepared to grow more (see Prov. 3:11-12). He therefore gives you experiences that stimulate growth, understanding, and compassion which polish you for your everlasting benefit. To get you

from where you are to where He wants you to be requires a lot of stretching, and that generally entails discomfort and pain (Elder Richard G. Scott, C.R., Oct 1995, p.18).

But Naomi was not as *empty* as she thought she was. He had one of the great daughters of all time, one who would give her an immortal scriptural legacy, and she had the honor of being an ancestor of the Son of God.

These are also lessons worth learning. As we walk down the sidewalk of sorrows that so often defines our mortal experiences, we must remember that we are loved by beings with absolute power, who know our needs and our limits, and who know what we can, with proper preparation, become.

Take a moment here to consider how good Ruth really was. In addition to her willingness to change her life and her religion and to stay with her destitute mother-in-law, we learn these wonderful things about Ruth:

She was willing to go into the fields and glean for food (Ruth 2:2).

Boaz, the owner of the field where she gleaned, knew of all that she had done for her mother in law (Ruth 2:11).

She sought a husband who would preserve her mother-in-law's inheritance in Israel rather than one who was young or rich (Ruth 3:10).

The entire city of Bethlehem knew how good she was (Ruth 3:11).

Naomi's friends told her that Ruth was better to her than seven sons (Ruth 4:15).

2. RUTH AND BOAZ MARRY AND HAVE A CHILD.

The following is from the Bible Dictionary.

Levirate Marriage: The custom of a widow marrying her deceased husband's brother or sometimes a near heir. The word has nothing to do with the name Levi or the biblical Levites, but is so called because of the Latin *levir*, meaning husband's brother, connected with the English suffix *ate*, thus constituting *levirate*. This system of marriage is designated in Deut. 25:5-10 (cf. Gen. 38:8), is spoken of in Matt. 22:23 ff.; it also forms a major aspect of the story of Ruth (Ruth

4:1-12).

There is an allusion to this practice in Naomi's declaration to her widowed daughters-in-law.

And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with me? are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Turn again, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have an husband. If I should say, I have hope, if I should have an husband also to night, and should also bear sons; Would ye tarry for them till they were grown? would ye stay for them from having husbands? (Ruth 1:11-13)

When Ruth met Boaz as she gleaned in his fields, he treated her kindly, fed her, and praised her for her goodness. When Ruth reported this to Naomi, who had though she was "empty," now saw a ray of hope for herself and her daughter.

And Naomi said unto her daughter in law, Blessed be he of the LORD, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead. And Naomi said unto her, The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen (Ruth 2:20).

There were no brothers of Ruth's dead husband to fulfill the levitate custom, but in the absence of a brother, a near kinsman could accept the obligation to marry the widow and raise up seed to the departed man.

Then Naomi her mother in law said unto her, My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee? And now is not Boaz of our kindred . . . ? (Ruth 3:1,2)

Ruth presented herself to Boaz and invited him to accept the duty of a near kinsman by marrying her. He was willing, but, he said, "there is a kinsman nearer than I." (Ruth 3:12) He took witnesses and approached the nearer kinsman and told him that the property of Elimelech was available for purchase, but, he warned, the purchase also involved a marriage.

What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy

it also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance. And the kinsman said, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance: redeem thou my right to thyself; for I cannot redeem it (Ruth 4:5,6).

Boaz agreed and said to the witnesses,

Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day (Ruth 4:10).

What comes next sounds almost like a blessing.

The LORD make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel: and do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Bethlehem . . . (Ruth 4:11).

And a similar thing was said to Naomi:

And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the LORD, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel (Ruth 4:14)

You may remember that Samson imitated the world until he became "like any other man" (Judges 16:17), but Ruth and her husband and Naomi would, by their righteousness, "be famous in Israel" (Ruth 4:11,14).

3. HANNAH IS BLESSED WITH A SON WHOM SHE LENDS TO THE LORD AS SHE PROMISED.

Hannah's longing for children is a marked contrast to the attitudes of many women in our day. The desire of hers to be a mother was so strong that she Presented herself before the Lord at the Tabernacle in fasting and prayer as she sought this blessing in her life (1 Samuel 1:7-15).

She had to know that a child would require months and years of attention,

innumerable batches of laundry (without a Kenmore to assist), sleepless nights and tear-filled days, and yet she wanted a child. Perhaps she saw what so many cannot: children are a blessing more than a burden. My daughter and her husband have 6 little children. They require astounding amounts of patience and care and attention. But her husband said to me just a few days ago, "if someone were dropping gold coins in your hand one at a time, when would you close your hand and say, 'that's enough.'"

I like Hannah! Even though her husband's other wife makes her life miserable with the mockery of her barrenness, Hannah turns to the Lord. She prayed in her sorrow (1 Sam 1:10); she vowed a vow that if given a son, she would give him to the Lord and make him a Nazarite all the days of his life (1 Sam 1:11); she poured out her soul to God (1 Sam 1:15); the Lord remembered her (1 Sam 1:19); She cherished her son and held him close until he was weaned (1 Sam 1:22); she brought him to the house of the Lord (1 Sam 1:24); and she lent the child to the Lord (1 Sam 1:28; 2: 20).

You remember Hannah who wanted a child and she went to the sanctuary to pray . . . a prayer from her heart to God that she might bear a child. And how earnest she was in that prayer, so earnest, so sincere, that she said, "If God will give me this child, I will lend him to the Lord for this life." (See 1 Sam. 1:11.) How well the mothers know that life is eternal. How well she knew that in lending this child to the Lord for this life, that beyond and down through the ages of eternity, he would be her child, and she would be his mother.

After the birth of her son and his presentation at the tabernacle,

Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoiceth in the LORD, mine horn is exalted in the LORD: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation (1 Samuel 2:1).

Take a moment to read the entire record of her rejoicing in 1 Samuel 2:1-11.

Hannah is another who might have believed, like Naomi, that the Lord had left her empty. But instead she believed and exercised faith and waited on the Lord, and the blessings came in abundance. First came Samuel. Then, later,

the LORD visited Hannah, so that she conceived, and bare three sons and two daughters (1 Samuel 2:20).

CONCLUSION: The stories remind me of the promise made by the Lord in 1 Nephi 21:15,16 and Isaiah 49:14-16.

But Zion said, The LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me.

We must believe that he will never forget us or leave us empty if we seek him. Sister Sherrie Dew said,

We no longer have the luxury of spending our energy on anything that does not lead us to Christ (Ensign, Nov. 11999, p. 98).

How well Ruth and Naomi and Hannah understood that, and how blessed they were for making the journey.

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