

GETTING OUT OF THE WILL OF GOD—PART 1 RUTH 1:1-7

Series Introduction:

The little book of Ruth has been called by some *"the greatest piece of literature ever written."* Another writer called the story of Ruth *"the Cinderella story of the Bible."* It is the story of **how a pagan girl named Ruth came to be part of the covenant people of Israel.** In these 100 verses that make up the book of Ruth, we see this young woman as she is pursued by grace, and brought out of her wretched condition. This is a story of **redemption, of love, of grace and of hope.** It is a story we need to become familiar with on a very intimate level.

Over the next several weeks, as the Lord leads, I will be preaching verse by verse through this book.

Sermon Introduction:

In these first seven verses of Ruth we are introduced to **the family of a man named Elimelech who lived during the days of the judges.** The story begins as a sad tale of **a man who chooses to walk out on the Lord and on God's plan for his life.** As a result of his decision, **he and his family pay a terribly high price.**

We are told that Elimelech takes his family to a place called **Moab.** Moab was located just across the Jordan River, east of the Promised Land. It was inhabited by people who worshiped pagan gods. The Moabites were the descendants of a man named Moab who was the son of an incestuous relationship between Lot and one of his daughters. (Genesis 19:30-38)

They were a proud people noted for their **lawlessness, immorality and brutal violence.** Listen to what Isaiah the prophet penned about Moab: *Isaiah 16:6—“We have heard of the pride of Moab; he is very proud: even of his haughtiness, and his pride, and his wrath. . .”*

Moses recorded in *Numbers 23-25* and *Deuteronomy 23:3-6* how Moab attacked and opposed Israel and sought to destroy the people of God during Israel's wilderness wanderings. (Look at **Deuteronomy 23:3-6**)

This was a people opposed to God and His ways!

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In *Psalm 60:8*, God says *"Moab is my washpot..."* That phrase means that **they were a despised thing!** God compared them to a vessel containing water that was used by slaves to wash the feet of a conquering hero. God says that they were nothing and that they would be reduced to the lowest form of slavery! Yet, they were a people who **could** have been saved had they repented of their sins as Ruth did!

It is to this despised and wicked nation that Elimelech moves his family. Here we see **a picture of one who willingly turns his back on the things of God and pays an awful price.**

If this section of Scripture teaches us anything, it teaches us that **living in a backslidden condition carries with it some devastating consequences,** but it also teaches that **repentance and restoration are always a possibility!**

With this information in mind today, let's begin to look into this passage of Scripture as I preach on the thought *"Getting Out Of The Will Of God."*

I. IT WAS A TIME OF DESPERATE CIRCUMSTANCES. (Vs. 1a)

There was a two-fold famine in the land.

A. There Was A Material Famine In The Land!

Verse 1 describes the situation that Elimelech and his family faced by telling us that there was *"a famine in the land."* Now a famine is not something that many of us are familiar with in our land of plenty. A famine is an extended period of time when food is in serious shortage.

Often, in Old Testament times, **God used famine as a tool of discipline.** When His people strayed away from Him, He would reach out to them **to call them back to Himself by orchestrating a famine.** (**Deuteronomy 11:16-17; 2 Chronicles 7:13-14**)

Now understand that while there was a shortage of food in the land at that time, that wasn't the only famine that the people of Israel faced. In fact they faced a famine that was worse!

B. There Was A Moral Famine In The Land!

Verse 1 tells us that this story takes place during the time of the Judges. The attitude of the people during those days is summed up in the last verse of the book of Judges, *Judges 21:25*.

The time of the Judges can best be described as a **time of turbulence and social upheaval**. They were days of **lawlessness, idolatry, false religion, theft, drunkenness, homosexuality, sexual perversion, violence, national division, and extreme unbelief**.

In other words, they were days that were not too different from the days in which we find ourselves living! Of course, when man *"does that which is right in his own eyes"*, what else should we expect? (e.g. *"Live and let live"* philosophy)

Could I tell you that as we pass through this life, God sometimes orchestrates some famine experiences for us as well.

It may take the form of a **financial famine**, when there is more month than money.

It may take the place of a **physical famine** where health and well being suffer.

It may take the form of a **spiritual famine** when the heavens become like brass and the Lord seems very far away.

Whatever form it takes, it is a famine in our life when something is missing or in short supply.

God's intention during those times of life is **not to drive us away** from Him, but it is to **draw us nearer** to Him.

He may use these times to correct us, *Revelation 3:19*—*"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent."*

He may use these times to perfect us, *2 Corinthians 12:9*—*"And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness."*

How we react to our famine experience determines whether it becomes a **time of blessing** or a **time of devastation** in our life.

IT WAS A TIME OF DESPERATE CIRCUMSTANCES.

II. IT WAS A TIME OF DANGEROUS CHOICES. (VS. 1b-2)

We see in these verses that Elimelech did not respond correctly to what the Lord was doing in his life.

Notice three mistakes he and his family made during this famine experience:

A. They Chose To Leave The Promised Land.

Verse 1 tells us that this man made a conscious decision to leave *"Bethlehem-Judah"* for the country of Moab.

The name *"Bethlehem"* means *"House of Bread"* and the name *"Judah"* means *"Praise."* Now at this time neither of those places were living up to their names. There was no bread in *"The House Of Bread"* and there was seemingly no reason for rejoicing in *"Praise"*.

But, while the geographic locations failed to live up to their names, neither did Elimelech! His name means *"My God Is King."*

If that had been true about this man, **he would have known that God's valleys do not last forever and that God would take care of him and see him through the time of famine.**

Yet, Elimelech **chose to leave his inheritance in the promised land and head off to a land that God had cursed and where God would not bless him!**

This is a scene repeated countless times in the family of God! There are many who proclaim themselves to be a *"Christian"*. That is a name that means *"Christlike One."* Yet, when a famine comes in their life, they run out on God.

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- Maybe things didn't go their way down at the Church house—so they quit Church and quit on God.
- Maybe a trial came in their life and they were blind sided by it—so they blame God rather than leaning on God's grace.
- Maybe they were placed in a financial crisis—so they abandon faithfulness to God and place their income before God.
- Maybe they just came to love the world more than they loved the Lord. (Like Paul's companion Demas)

Whatever the reason, they chose to walk out of the promised land of God's blessing and to head off into the world to live life on their own terms. There is a word for that kind of behavior: **It is called "backsliding!"** And I am afraid that there are more believers in that shape than are willing to admit it!

They Chose To Leave The Promised Land.

B. They Chose To Live In A Polluted Land.

To leave Israel to go to Moab was in violation of a clear commandment of the Lord! (**Joshua 23:6-7, 11-13**) In spite of God's clear commandment, Elimelech chose the forbidden path to Moab over the Lord's way of staying in the land of promise!

To leave one's inheritance as Elimelech did was equivalent to denying the faith of the Lord God Jehovah. It was a turning away from God to the world!

You see, for Elimelech and his family, this move to Moab involved total separation from the things of God.

They could not worship at the tabernacle.

They could not bring their offerings.

They could not keep the feasts that were commanded by the Law.

They were totally isolated from everything that stood for God.

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Not only that, but by moving his family to Moab, Elimelech exposed his family to evils they would have avoided had they just stayed in Israel.

For instance, both of his boys married pagan women. It is never right for a child of God to marry an unbeliever! *2 Corinthians 6:14-15—“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? 15 And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?”*

Elimelech's family violated the known will of God by intermingling with this pagan race of people.

How many times today is this same thing repeated in the lives of those who call themselves God's children?

When a believer walks away from the things of the Lord, they can't serve the Lord the way that they should. Friend, **there is no way to be right with the Lord as long as you are separated from the things of God!**

When God's house— His word, His work, His worship and His will—are not priorities in our life, it doesn't matter what our mouth says, our life says that we are away from the Lord!

The believer who walks away from the things of the Lord is saying, *"God wasn't as good to me as I thought He should be. He isn't worthy of my love and devotion."*

It's a choice that always leads downward. If we walk out on God, we will find ourselves doing things we never thought possible! We will see ourselves involved in wrong relationships and worldly activities. It is a dangerous thing to choose the world over the Lord!

They Chose To Leave The Promised Land.

They Chose To Live In A Polluted Land.

C. They Chose To Linger In A Prodigal Land.

This family went to Moab and there they stayed! The word "**continued**" means "*to exist or to become.*" I believe this indicates that **not only did Elimelech and his family go into Moab, but that Moab got into them as well!** God alone knows how far into the sin and society of Moab this family fell.

When they left for Moab they probably intended that it would be only for a short time. But the **days turned into weeks, the weeks into months** and the **months into years**. Before they knew it, 10 years had passed, and they were farther away from the Lord than they could have ever imagined themselves being.

That is an example of the deceptive nature of sin!

There may be some here today who are in Moab this morning in your heart and you can't even see it!

For whatever reason, you have decided that God and His plan for your life doesn't suit you. Maybe you are struggling against something He has allowed to happen in your life. Whatever the reason, you are away from Him today. You probably never thought you would get as far away from the Lord as you have, or that you would stay as long as you have.

While we are on the subject, I want to remind you that going to Moab doesn't always involve an actual, physical move. There are folks who **may attend church regularly, pay their tithes, who outwardly may live clean, moral lives, but they are in Moab this morning.**

You see, we can go to Moab spiritually even when we just allow our attitude to get bad.

1. When we become **critical, quick to find fault in others, but remain blind to the fault in our own hearts**, we have gone to Moab.
2. When we **use our tongues as weapons instead of witnessing tools**, we have gone to Moab.
3. When we **harbor grudges and ill will toward others, we have gone to Moab.**

Remember that not all the prodigals leave the Father's house physically, though they are miles away spiritually. (Remember the Prodigal son's brother who remained at home?)

Conclusion

Now, my intention today is not to rub salt in anyone's wounds. My goal is to help you get out of Moab and get back to the "*House of Bread*" and the place of "*Praise*". Sometimes, the only way that will ever happen is for us to be confronted about our sins and our backsliding!

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