

Lesson 9 - Ruth: Example of Self-Sacrifice

Objectives

By the end of this lesson the student should know that:

- Recount the main events in the life of Ruth.
- Know that God worked through Ruth to fulfill the promise made to Abraham and his descendants.
- Understand that Ruth is an example of self-sacrifice for the sake of another.
- Recognize the other Old Testament women mentioned in this chapter.

For the Catechist

God promised Abraham that he would be the father of many nations. This promise was threatened to go unfulfilled many times, from the beginning. Abraham's wife Sarah was sterile; it was only through the generous gift of God that she was able to bear a son.

Over the years, plots and intrigues threatened to bring this blood-line to an end. Often when the generations of Abraham's line were threatened, God intervened through various women. One such intervention is related in the Book of Ruth. Ruth was not an Israelite but a Moabite, that is, from a group of people living on the other side of the Dead Sea (part of today's Jordan). When her Jewish husband died, she would have been free to return to her own relatives where she would have been cared for. Instead Ruth chose to accompany her mother-in-law Naomi back to Bethlehem. There Ruth became the wife of Boaz, a relative of her deceased husband. Their son was Obed, the father of Jesse, who would be the father of King David. For this reason, many Jews even today refer to Ruth as the matriarch of the messiah's line.

Ruth's decision to remain with Naomi is presented as a model of self-sacrifice. She put her mother-in-law's welfare above her own, becoming little more than a beggar rather than abandoning her. Her story opens the way to discussing the choices we face in life and our conviction that the purpose of life is not to simply enjoy oneself. Mature Christians and non-Christians alike find meaning in serving others, whether in their family, their community or the world at large.

The lesson also makes the point that, because of Ruth's generosity and devotion to Naomi, she was the one through whom the line between Abraham and King David was preserved. In our culture the decision to have children is a private one and many people see having children as an encumbrance to their own lives. In the Biblical world a child might be the messiah or at least further God's purposes as well as contribute to the family's welfare. Not to have descendants was often seen as a mark of God's displeasure. Foregoing marriage or children was only comprehensible as a sign of dedication to God. Again these aspects of the story of Ruth may be the occasion for discussing the aims of life and marriage today.

Materials Needed:

Opening Prayer: Icon corner, student texts

Introduction: Easel or wall pad, markers, Decision Worksheet

Guided Reading: Bibles

Activity A: "Ruth, Christ and Us" worksheet, pencils, Bibles

Activity B: "Women of the Old Testament" Worksheet, pencils, Bibles

Activity C: Jesse Tree Worksheet, craft items

- 1. Opening Prayer** Pray the selection from Psalm 105 from page 42 in the student text. Remind the students that this Psalm is a prayerful retelling of the story of the Israelites in the days of Moses.
- 2. Review** Review the main points of the previous lesson using the pages from your wall or easel pad.
Alternate: If you used Activity A in the previous lesson, have the students who participated recall highlights of their skit on Moses and the Exodus.
- Refer to the Unit Page to show the relationship of the days of the Judges to the days of the Patriarchs and the Tribes in this first phase of Israelite history. Note that at this stage the Israelite Tribes had settled in the Holy Land.
- 3. Introduction** Distribute the Decision Worksheet and have each student complete it on their own then share their answers. Remind the students that every choice we make in life involves a sacrifice. Choosing one thing means giving up something else. Sometimes the choice is easy; at other times it means giving up something we really want. Note that parents regularly make sacrifices for their children; sometimes people must sacrifice their own pleasure or welfare to care for their parents. The story of Ruth is a story of this kind of sacrifice.

Background Reading (Judges):

"Once in the promised land, the people of Israel considered themselves to be under the immediate sovereignty of their God. They formed a loose confederacy of tribes led politically by various 'judges,' and led religiously by prophets and priests. The most well-known judge is Samson whose story is told in Judges 13-16. Despite the periodic emergence of a judge, the ultimate ruler of the chosen people could only be the Lord Himself. Eventually, however, the people felt themselves to be at a disadvantage with respect to the neighboring kingdoms. They demanded, 'There must be a king over us. We too must be like other nations, with a king to rule us and to lead us warfare and fight our battles' (1 Kgs/1 Sam 8:20 NAB)" (*LLI* 37).

"Following Joshua's death, various leaders whom the Bible calls 'judges' arose as circumstances demanded to lead Israel. As described in the book that bears their name, the judges' task was to oppose idol worship at home while fighting off the foreign invaders whom the Scriptures view as God's punishment for idolatry. The twelve judges display sharply differing characters and virtues. ..." (*OTB* 84).

4. Guided Reading, Pages 43-44

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After they had escaped from Egypt, the Israelites had been ruled by Moses. After his death, Joshua became their commander. He led them into the Promised Land and made it possible to settle there by defeating their enemies. The Israelites settled in the Promised Land with each tribe or clan inhabiting a different area. When enemies threatened the Israelites, God raised up other leaders to defend them. For over three hundred years the Israelites lived this way under leaders the Bible calls *Judges*. Some Judges were very wise and continued to rule the people according to God's ways. Others allowed the people to stray from God's covenant, even joining the Canaanites in pagan rituals worshipping their false gods of the sun, the moon, fertility, wine and war.

Still God remained true to His covenant with the Israelites. When it seemed that Abraham's descendants would die out, God worked to see that his line continued. God intervened to fulfill His promise to Abraham, "I will make of you a great nation." One of the people God worked through was Ruth.

During the days of the Judges, a famine came to the people of Israel. Some of the people moved to nearby Moab, on the other side of the Dead Sea, seeking to sustain themselves.

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Before the reading, summarize the objectives of the lesson on a wall pad or easel pad so that the page can be preserved and used for review next week.

Review: Ask the students if they know what happened to the Israelites after Moses led them out of Egypt. Where did they live? (*In the wilderness of Sinai*) How long did they live there? (*Forty years*). Note that today their story continues.

Have the students **read the first paragraph** on page 43. Refer the students to their copies of the New American Bible to find the Book of Joshua, which tells of the coming of the Israelites into the Promised Land.

Refer to the map on page 171 ("The Coming of the Israelites") to show where each tribe settled. Remind them that the twelve tribes were named after Jacob's sons (Reuben, Simeon, Judah, Isaachar, Zebulun, Dan, Naphthali, Gad, Asher, Joseph and Benjamin). Joseph received a double share of honor with two tribes named after his sons Manasseh and Ephraim. Have the students refer to the list of Jacob's sons in Lesson 7.

Ask: Which son besides Joseph is missing from the list? (*Levi*) Note that Levi's tribe was dedicated to serve God as priests and Levites. They had no land of their own because all the Israelites were expected to provide for them.

Refer the students back to the first paragraph in the lesson. Ask: How many years were the Israelites living as tribes, each in their own area? (*Over 300 years*) Note that important stories from those years are found in the Book of Judges.

Background Reading (Twelve Judges):

". . . Among [the twelve judges] was the woman Deborah (Judges 4-5); some, like Samson (Judges 13-16) seem ill-equipped for leadership. One outstanding judge was Gideon (Judges 6-8) to whom the people offered a hereditary kingship in recognition of his victory over the Midianites (Judges 8:22). Gideon's indignant reply, 'I will not rule over you; ... the Lord will rule over you' (3:23), expressed the ideal around which the Hebrew nation was organized. Leaders arose as they were needed but there was no king in Israel, for God Himself was Israel's Lord" (*OTB* 84).

During the days of war, the Moabites were friendly toward the Israelites and had a similar language and customs as they were friendly to the Egyptians. But they were people who worshipped their own god and they called Chemosh.

Among the Israelites who went to Moab were Elimelech and his wife Naomi. Elimelech died a short time later and Naomi lived with her sons and their wives. Moabite women married Ruth and Orpah. Ten years later, when the harvest was nearly over,

Naomi's sons died, leaving their children widows. In those days widows had to live with their other relatives if they had any children to make use of them. Naomi prepared to return to her Israelite relatives and take Orpah and Ruth.

Orpah returned to her mother-in-law, but Ruth refused to leave Naomi. She was determined to stay with Naomi, and begged her, saying, "Do not send me to abandon you. For wherever you go I will go, wherever you lodge I will lodge, your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Wherever you go I will go and where you remain I will remain. For wherever you go, there will I go, for my God is your God." (Ruth 1:16-17) Ruth would not abandon her mother-in-law, even when it meant leaving her own country and her own people to take care of her husband's mother. And so, Naomi and Ruth together traveled back to Bethlehem, Naomi's original home.

Ruth Lives in Poverty

Ruth's decision to return to Israel with her mother-in-law was a brave act of love, loyalty, and faith. She sacrificed much as the Moabites would not be alone. Naomi and Ruth were very poor in material goods, but it is there that the God and the rock of their faith would give the barley fields to gather the stray grains so that she and her mother-in-law might have some food.

One day, while gleaning in a field, Ruth met the landowner named Boaz, who was a distant relative of Naomi. Boaz said to her servants to help Ruth and give her anything she needed. When Ruth asked why he was being so generous to her, Boaz said that he began to love Ruth when she had given up to take a job of poverty. "For here I have left my mother and my father and my mother-in-law, and the land of my birth, and have come to a land that is not my own, for you have been so good to me that I have followed you." (Ruth 2:10-12)

Ruth Inspires Boaz

Boaz was impressed with how much Ruth had sacrificed and how much she loved Naomi. He had to look at a woman who was so poor and so much loved by her mother-in-law. Boaz and Ruth had a son, Obed.

5. Ruth Lives in Poverty Page 44

Continue reading the next four paragraphs from the lesson. Ask the students to recall what they had learned about famines, common in biblical days and often in our own days as well in Africa or in times of war or dictatorships.

Refer to the map on page 172 ("The Kingdom of David and Solomon") to locate Moab. Explain that, since the Moabites worshipped Chemosh, a false god, we would call them pagans.

Emphasize Ruth's choice (Ruth 1:16-17): she didn't have to go with Naomi. She had her own relatives in Moab.

Continue the reading on page 44. After reading the first paragraph, compare what Ruth was doing to the ways of people today who recover discarded drink cans and bottles. Do you think she would have to do that if she went back to her family in Moab?

According to Jewish tradition, Boaz agreed to marry Ruth "in order to raise up a Jewish son for her husband on his estate, so that the name of the departed man not perish among his kinsmen and his fellow citizens." (When the details of Matthew's Gospel are read, they say, "When she [Ruth] made this pledge, she gave her life to the God of Israel, who had chosen her to be the mother of Jesus, who would become the Father of David." (Ruth 1:16-17) She has said the Father of Jesus, who would become the Father of David. The Book of Ruth ends by showing that there was an affliction time concerning Boaz, the great great grandson of Abraham, and Boaz and his descendants.

"These are the descendants of Perez. Perez was the father of Hezron. Hezron was the father of Ram. Ram was the father of Jether, Jether was the father of Uzzah. Uzzah was the father of Hur. Hur was the father of Uz. Uz was the father of Zerah. Zerah was the father of Yehonatan. Yehonatan was the father of David." (1 Chronicles 2:10-12)

From the descendants of Boaz and Ruth came David's grandfather, David. Even though Boaz did not receive it while making his choice, his decision helped to preserve the link between the descendants of Abraham and David the King, continuing the Jewish history.

Ruth, Ancestor of Christ

In Matthew's Gospel begins by listing the descendants of Abraham to show how they connect to Jesus Christ.

"The Book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham became the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob. Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. Judah became the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar. Perez became the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram. Ram the father of Jether, Jether the father of Uzzah. Uzzah became the father of Hur, Hur the father of Uz. Uz became the father of Zerah. Zerah the father of Yehonatan. Yehonatan the father of David." (Matthew 1:1-16)

Perez David's descendant Christ was his heir. In God's plan Ruth's sacrifice to Naomi was to bear fruit in Salvation History, she would become an ancestor of Christ himself.

Our Worship Recalls the Old Testament

On the two Sundays before Christmas we remember those who lived before Christ and figured in Salvation History. We praise them as heroes like the following:

"By Your power, O Lord, great-hearted women came carried out wilderness works among them were Hannah, their faith, the valiant Deborah, Jael and Esther, Sarah and Miriam (the sister of Moses), Esthonia, Rachel and Ruth."

Read the section "**Ruth Inspires Boaz.**" Note that Boaz' life changed when he realized what Ruth had given up for Naomi. First, he told his servants to let Ruth collect the stray grains. Ask:

- What did he do next? (*Made a commitment to care for Ruth and Naomi*)
- And after that? (*Married Ruth to continue her husband's line*)

Explain that such matters mattered much more in Boaz' days than they do in our world. We may be bored by these lists of names, but throughout biblical times it was very important to show that you were connected to the first Israelites and to famous descendants. Compare to the few remaining Americans whose ancestors came over on the Mayflower, fought in the American Revolution, or were founding members of any organization.

Background Reading (Gospel Genealogy):

"The Evangelists Matthew and Luke both provide family trees which demonstrate Jesus' descent from King David. Both likewise place his birth in Bethlehem, the birthplace of David and the object of the well-known prophecy of Micah: 'But you, Bethlehem-Ephrathah, too small to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel; whose origin is from of old; from ancient times' (Micah 5:1). Nazareth, Jesus' adopted home town, in the region of Galilee also accommodates messianic interpretation" (OTB 109).

Read the section "**Ruth, Ancestor of Christ**" (p. 45). Have the students compare the genealogies in Ruth and Matthew. Ask:

- Where are they the same? (*The Gospel genealogy begins earlier and includes some women, including Ruth.*)
- What is Ruth in relation to David? (*His great-grandmother*)

Matthew's genealogy continues for another 900 years, from the time of David to the birth of Christ. By then people knew what Ruth and Boaz could never imagine: they would be ancestors of the Messiah.

6. Activity A (Ruth, Christ and Us)

Distribute the Activity A Worksheet and have the students complete it and share their answers. Stress how Ruth's self-sacrifice for Naomi points to the kind of love to which Christ calls all His people

7. Activity B. (Women of the Old Testament)

Distribute the Activity B Worksheet and have the students complete it and share their answers. You may wish to have students express the characteristic they identified in charade form.

8. Activity C (Jesse Tree)

Have the students complete the ornament on the Jesse Tree Worksheet (Ruth, Jesse).

9. Time Line

Display the time line poster. Have the students brainstorm the names of people mentioned in this lesson (*Ruth, Naomi, Boaz, Jesse, Dinah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Hilda, Judith*) and indicate the period in which each lived. Write in the names and dates under each appropriate heading. Reemphasize the idea that the days of the judges are considered the first era in Israelite history after the exodus.

10. Summary

End the lesson by summarizing the lesson from the aims on page 156, from the elements in the student text on which you focused, and/or from any other points raised in the lesson.

11. Closing Prayer

Conclude with the reading of Hannah's Song and/or the troparion of the "great-hearted women" from the Sunday of the Ancestors on pages 45 and 47 in the student text.

What Would You Choose?

The long-awaited day had finally arrived - the circus had come to town! You and your best friend have saved money for this event. The day you bought the tickets was an exciting one, only to be surpassed on the day you attend the performance.

The night before finds you unable to sleep. Your dreams are jammed with performing elephants, brave lion tamers, agile trapeze artists, trained dogs, jovial clowns, and three rings of continual excitement. You can almost hear the crowd cheering.

At last, the morning of the big day - you awake to find it raining heavily. But you won't let that dampen your spirits. You look again at the admission tickets on your dresser. Shortly after breakfast you and your friend will be on your way. Suddenly you hear your name being called from the kitchen. Your mother tells you that you are wanted on the phone.

When you pick up the receiver, it doesn't take long to recognize the distress in the voice at the other end of the line. Your friend has called to let you know that he cannot go to the circus with you. The heavy rains have caused a break in the water line and there is a flood in the basement. He sadly reports that he is needed to stay at home and help his parents move furniture before more damage is done. They need all the help they can get. He tells you to go to the circus and enjoy yourself. However, the sadness in his voice makes you have second thoughts. You are faced with a decision. You could:

- Go to the circus alone.
- Call another friend and ask him to go with you.
- Stay home and not go to the circus at all
- Not go to the circus, but go help your friend.

Which would be your choice?

I would _____

Because _____

Ruth, Christ and Us

The story of Ruth offers us an example of a self-sacrificing person who is really concerned with others. Ruth gave up her own security to care for Naomi. Her story points to Christ's way of living: a way of living to which all Christians are called.

I. - Review the story of Ruth and answer the following questions:

What did Ruth leave behind and give up for Naomi's sake? (Ruth 2:11)

What kind of life did Ruth share in Bethlehem? (Ruth 2:7,9)

What was the final result of her decision to stay with Naomi? (Ruth 4:10-15)

II. - Read Philippians 2:5-11 and answer the following questions:

What did Christ leave behind and give up for our sake?

What kind of life did Christ share in our world?

What was the final result of His decision to empty Himself?

III. - Reread Philippians 2:5. What do you think it might mean to "have the same attitude" as Christ according to this passage?

Ruth, Christ and Us

The story of Ruth offers us an example of a self-sacrificing person who is really concerned with others. Ruth gave up her own security to care for Naomi. Her story points to Christ's way of living: a way of living to which all Christians are called.

I. - Review the story of Ruth and answer the following questions:

What did Ruth leave behind and give up for Naomi's sake? (Ruth 2:11)

Her parents and her country

What kind of life did Ruth share in Bethlehem? (Ruth 2:7,9)

Hard-working, poor

What was the final result of her decision to stay with Naomi? (Ruth 4:10-15)

Marriage and motherhood

II. - Read Philippians 2:5-11 and answer the following questions:

What did Christ leave behind and give up for our sake?

Equality with God His Father

What kind of life did Christ share in our world?

The form of a slave, humble

What was the final result of His decision to empty Himself?

God greatly exalted Him

III. - Reread Philippians 2:5. What do you think it might mean to "have the same attitude" as Christ according to this passage?

Women of the Old Testament

What kind of women lived in Old Testament times? Look up the following passages and find a word or words used to describe the characters mentioned. How did God work in them to further His saving plan?

A - In the Days of the Patriarchs:

Sarah (Genesis 18:9-15)

Rachel (Genesis 29:16-20)

B - In the Days of the Judges:

Hannah (1 Samuel 1:15-19)

Naomi (Ruth 1:19-21)

God worked in all kinds of people, despite their weaknesses, to further His plans in Salvation History.

Ruth and Jesse



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