

**A Love Story, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. 22061105**  
**Ruth 1:1-18 and Mark 12:28-34**  
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The phrase, “Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God.”<sup>1</sup> has been used in weddings. My sister sang it as a solo during Sue’s and my wedding. It is a beautiful statement of commitment. It speaks of the depth of relationships. Its use recognizes the fact that marriage is more than just a relationship between two people. Marriage involves commitment to one another while taking into account job locations and families of origin with all of their quirks.

Marriage involves sharing a home and sharing faith. If the couple does not understand these aspects of commitment, their marriage may be doomed. It is destined to run out of gas when one wants to follow a career that takes them hundreds of miles from the other’s parents. It will run the red light at the intersection of church involvement and atheism.

If this statement of commitment is used in weddings, it might sound strange to you that it was originally made by one woman to another. Ruth, the young widow from Moab, made the commitment to her mother-in-law Naomi. Three widows included Naomi the mother-in-law, and two daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah. Naomi, hearing that there was once again food available back in Israel, said goodbye to Orpah and Ruth. Ruth chose to go with Naomi, forsaking her homeland and any family that she might have had left. She made the trek with Naomi back across the Jordan river to Israel.

You need to know what these two women must have thought and talked about as they made their way across the desert sands. They were afraid as they wondered how they would survive. A widow had no means of support. A widow was reduced to gleaning after crops were harvested out of the field, or to become a beggar. Here, then, were these two widows, clinging to each other for support. Naomi tried to get Ruth to stay in Moab because she was young and could perhaps find some man to marry her. Ruth chose to go with Naomi to a foreign land.

Surely, Naomi warned Ruth that foreigners were not welcome in Israel. The law made foreigners second-class citizens by forbidding purchases from them<sup>2</sup> and making them unwelcome at Passover celebrations.<sup>3</sup> The book of Ezra draws clear line of distinction between Jews and foreigners. Ruth would be a doubly-second-class person. She was not just a widow, but a foreigner also.

As Ruth trekked through the desert, God had a secret in store. Ruth had no way of knowing that she would be the great-grandmother of King David.<sup>4</sup>

The book of Ruth was written during a xenophobic period of Israel’s history. It showed that the greatest King in all of Israel’s history was himself, of foreign blood. This story is intentionally part of the Bible to show that God loves the foreigners as much as the chosen Israelites. Foreigners such as Ruth were capable of making deep commitments.

This is the story of a family being born. Ruth’s choice was the choosing of a family. It was a conscious decision, in spite of all of the odds, to go with her mother-in-law. We hear that blood

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<sup>1</sup>Ruth 1:16-17

<sup>2</sup>Lev. 22:25

<sup>3</sup>Ex. 12:43

<sup>4</sup>Ruth 4:17

is thicker than water. This is usually taken to mean that family blood ties are stronger than marriages or other kinds of association. For Ruth, water was thicker than blood. She left her family of origin in favor of her commitment to her mother-in-law Naomi. Ruth gave up her culture, friends, and family to join Naomi's culture, friends, and family.

The story of Ruth is the story of commitment. She made a heartfelt commitment to Naomi and she kept it. That is the key to relationships, a key that, I fear, has been neglected in today's world.

A decade ago, in our neighborhood in Michigan, our daughter had a friend from Bangladesh. I discovered that, in spite of all of the American culture she had seen, she was content with having her family pick out her husband for her. Why is it that arranged marriages work out? They seem so strange, so foreign to us. How can you marry someone you have never seen before? Such a marriage is not based on the physical appearance of the partners. It is not based on falling in love. If we can fall in love, we can also fall out of love. The eroticism, the physical attraction will fade. Love is based on commitment. It is a decision.

We are not talking here only of marriages. We are talking about all relationships among humans: national citizenship; business deals; college alumni support; and church membership. If I base my citizenship on what my country can do for me, how it will support me in my old age, and how it can grant me individual freedom, my citizenship will fade. My citizenship must be based on my commitment to my country and more importantly, to my fellow citizens.

If I base my church membership on what looks attractive to me, it will prove empty. The attractive can fade with the first financial stewardship campaign. Infatuation ends with the first disagreement at a committee meeting. Church membership is based on commitment.

If I base my relationship with God on feeling, then, when I'm disappointed in the way things are going in my life, I will turn away from God. My faith must be based on a commitment to God. It is a decision and a choice.

When we listen to Ruth, trekking her way across the desert sands, we can learn a lot about commitment, courage, determination, and love. Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God.