

Ruth 1 Chapter Study

INTRODUCTION

The Book of Ruth is above all, a wonderfully romantic love story.

Its beauty is all the greater because of its setting.

It takes place during the dark days of the Judges, when Israel was deep into backsliding.

The book opens at a time of famine, when God had sent calamity on the land to awaken the people to their apostasy.

If we'd been reading straight over from the previous book, Judges then we'd have just learned about 2 case studies of just how terrifying things were in Israel at this time.

You may remember that the last 5 chs. of Judges tell 2 separate shocking stories to illustrate what the author means when he says that in those days, because there was no king in Israel, everyone did what was right in his/her own eyes.

The story of Ruth is a beautiful bright spot in the midst of an ugly dark time in Israel.

The authorship of Ruth is uncertain.

Jewish tradition attributes it to the last of the Judges, Samuel.

While it's very possible he composed the *majority* of the book, its ending was probably added by a later author, as we see with some other of the OT books.

I. REFUGE IN MOAB Ch. 1

A. *What Befell Elimelech's Family Vs. 1-5*

1 Now it came to pass, in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem, Judah, went to dwell in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons.

The time of the Judges was a time of repeated cycles of renewal & apostasy.

God would bless & Israel would prosper.

Instead of giving God thanks, they lost their sense of dependence on God & used their excess wealth to fund immorality.

They turned from God to worship idols more appealing to their lusts.

God warned them to repent & return or experience judgment.

But their ears were deaf, so judgment came until the land was reduced to desperation.

Then they would cry out to God, Who in His steadfast mercy delivered them by sending a powerful leader who turned things around.

Then the whole cycle would start over again.

As this book opens, it's a time of apostasy, so famine has settled on the land.

The neighboring region of Moab was okay, so this man moved his family from their home in Bethlehem there.

2 The name of the man was Elimelech, the name of his wife was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion—

Ephrathites of Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to the country of Moab and remained there.

Elimelech means “My God is King.”

It seems he was born during a time in the cycle of revival & apostasy when Israel was doing *well* in their devotion to God.

Elimelech’s wife was Naomi, which means “My Delight” a precious name for a daughter or wife.

They had 2 sons, Mahlon & Chilion [Mach-lone & Kil-yone].

Mahlon means “sick.” Chilion means “pining” as in a desperate but passive longing.

Since names were often reflective of a person’s nature or the conditions of their birth, Elimelech & Naomi’s boys appear to be less than the vital, strapping youths a mother & father hope for.

Bethlehem, 5 miles south of Jerusalem, was their home.

But with the famine growing worse, they traveled 50 miles east to Moab on the other side of the Dead Sea, where there was food.

V. 2 identifies the family as “Ephrathites.”

Ephrathah was another name for Bethlehem.

What likely happened is that 2 neighborhoods grew & merged into one village.

In other passages the city is called Bethlehem Ephrathah.

Eventually it was shortened to just “Bethlehem.”

Elimelech’s family lived in the neighborhood known as *Ephrathah*.

3 Then Elimelech, Naomi’s husband, died; and she was left, and her two sons.

How long they lived in Moab before Elimelech died isn’t stated.

But his death would have been a crushing blow to Naomi.

Remember that in that culture & time, a woman’s fate was entirely dependent on her husband. Being a widow was a terrifying prospect.

So here’s Naomi – living in a foreign land, a widow, with 2 kids.

It seems no matter what decision the family makes, the noose only gets tighter.

4 Now they took wives of the women of Moab: the name of the one was Orpah [Gazelle], and the name of the other Ruth [Friendly]. And they dwelt there about ten years.

Naomi’s family lived in Moab for a decade.

That was long enough for Mahlon & Chilion to mature to the age of needing wives.

They married Moabite women; which they really ought not have because the Moabites had been marked by Moses in Deut. 23 as *exempt* from the congregation of Israel.

This was their judgment for opposing Israel during the Exodus.

5 Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died; so the woman survived her two sons and her husband.

It’s often said that a parent should *never* have to attend the funeral of their child.

Naomi first buried her husband, then both her sons, in foreign soil.

There are some important lessons in these first 5 vs.

First, Elimelech ought never had left his home in Bethlehem.

Later events prove that while life *was* tough during the famine, it wasn't *impossible*.

Things were tight for nearly a decade, but the famine eventually lifted.

Like his ancestors Abraham & Isaac, when famine came, instead of staying put & looking to God, he bailed & went running to a foreign land where he placed his family in grave danger.

Elimelech's name means "My God is King." But he didn't live up to his name. If God was *really* his sovereign, Elimelech would have stayed put in the Land of Promise, working the plot of land given him by God.

He cut & ran, not because life was *impossible* in Bethlehem, but because it was *difficult* & he heard things were *easier* in Moab.

The problem is, Moab ought never have even been an option since God's curse lay on it.

What good could *possibly* come from moving to a place God says is off limits? Elimelech is a good portrait of those who call themselves "Christians" but really have no interest in living God's way.

Instead of abiding in the mercy & grace of God, they consider the life of a genuine believer too tough & adopt a lifestyle more in tune with the world than the Kingdom of God.

By doing so, they drag their entire family along with them into a place of compromise & grave spiritual danger.

Mom & Dad, if you want your children to grow up to be godly men & women, who follow the Lord & make wise choices, you need to be modeling that path for them now.

If you want them to choose a solid, mature believer as a spouse, then need to be that very thing in your marriage NOW.

The Christian life isn't easy, but it's right & good & bears wonderful results & rewards when you hang in there.

The way of the world *looks* easier & more fun, but its promises *always* end up being empty & yielding nothing but grief.

B. Naomi Returns Home Vs. 6-22

1. She sends her daughters-in-law back vs. 6-14

6 Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had visited His people by giving them bread.

With news that the famine had lifted, Naomi began the trip home.

7 Therefore she went out from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. **8** And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each to her mother's house. The LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. **9** The LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband." So she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.

As Naomi began her journey, she told Orpah & Ruth their fortunes would be better served by staying in their own land – something Naomi had come to learn the hard way!

She told them to return to their parents' homes & find nice Moabite men to marry. Because both women were childless, finding new husbands wouldn't be too difficult.

10 And they said to her, “Surely we will return with you to your people.” **11 But Naomi said, “Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Are there still sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? 12 Turn back, my daughters, go—for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, if I should have a husband tonight and should also bear sons, 13 would you wait for them till they were grown? Would you restrain yourselves from having husbands? No, my daughters; for it grieves me very much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD has gone out against me!”**

When Naomi told them to go home, both ladies declared their intentions of following her home.

So Naomi tried to *reason* with them – since a woman's welfare at that time was *totally dependent* on her husband, she focused on that issue.

According to custom, if a man died before producing any heirs, it was his brother's duty to produce a child in his name with his widow.

Naomi makes it clear she's not going to be having any more sons, she's too old now.

Even if she were to get pregnant that very day, it would be years before any sons would be old enough for them.

In the meantime, the best years of their lives would pass away childless.

Naomi saw the whole thing as a huge injustice & she's ruining the decision to leave Bethlehem in the first place.

None of this would have happened if they had just stayed where they belonged.

14 Then they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

Orpah was persuaded by Naomi's logic, said a tearful goodbye, & headed home.

Logic wasn't the issue with Ruth, *love* was. She loved her mother-in-law & decided she was willing to endure whatever fate handed her as long as she could be close to Naomi.

2. Ruth stays with Naomi vs. 15-18

15 And she [Naomi] said, “Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.” **16 But Ruth said: “Entreat me not to leave you, Or to turn back from following after you; For wherever you go, I will go; And wherever you lodge, I will lodge; Your people shall be my people, And your God, my God. 17 Where you die, I will die, And there will I be buried. The LORD do so to me, and more also, If anything but death parts you and me.”**

Ruth's mind is made up – she's going to follow Naomi, not just back to Bethlehem,

but to the grave.

A special bond had grown between these two women.

Naomi's love for Ruth moved her to urge her to stay in Moab where common sense said she would fare much better.

Ruth's love for Naomi was willing to lose everything for the sake of staying close to her.

It's clear from Ruth's use of the covenant name of God in v.17 that Naomi had been teaching her about the God of Israel.

Ruth took an oath in God's name, swearing abiding devotion to her mother-in-law.

Though Moses had made it clear in Deut. 23 the Moabites were barred from participating in the life & covenant of Israel, Ruth, a Moabite, ended up becoming, not only part of Israel, but the ancestor of both King David & Jesus Christ! How do we reconcile this?

Ruth's love of Naomi was so strong, it *erased* all other loyalties.

There was nothing of Moab that clung to Ruth but the unfortunate fact of her past.

Her oath reveals that her heart completely shed any attachment that would stand in the way of her devotion to her mother-in-law.

Ruth is a wonderful picture of the sinner who repents & comes to faith in Christ.

God has made it clear that no sinner shall inherit eternal life.

But when the sinner repents of his/her sin, turns their back on all they once were & pledges unswerving devotion to Christ, God no longer calls that person a sinner – now they're a saint.

18 When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she stopped speaking to her.

That is, she stopped trying to dissuade her.

I'm sure Naomi was comforted now in the knowledge she would not be making the trek home alone.

3. The homecoming vs. 19-22

19 Now the two of them went until they came to Bethlehem. And it happened, when they had come to Bethlehem, that all the city was excited because of them; and the women said, "Is this [My delight] Naomi?" ²⁰ **But she said to them, "Do not call me [My Delight] Naomi; call me [Bitter] Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.**

²¹ **I went out full, and the LORD has brought me home again empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?"**

There'd been no communication between Elimelech's family & home for 10 years so the people of Bethlehem assumed they were gone for good.

What a surprise to see Naomi again after all those years!

While the people of Bethlehem were joyous at her return, Naomi found the homecoming hollow because her family was gone, she was wiped out!

She blamed her misfortune on God, which is what people often do when they

experience loss.

But God is not the source of tragedy, sin is.

Sin isn't usually the DIRECT cause of death, but ultimately it IS the *indirect* cause.

It was Man's choice to rebel against God in the Garden of Eden that brought the curse on creation & began the process of corruption & death.

All disease & illness has at their root the curse of sin.

It was wrong for Naomi to blame God for the loss of her husband & sons.

Their death had more to do with their decision to spend a decade in Moab.

22 So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. Now they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.