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## What Does the Bible Say About Ruth and Naomi?

“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 sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. 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.

Then Elimelech, Naomi’s husband, died; and she was left, and her two sons. Now they took wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth. And they dwelt there about ten years. Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died; so the woman survived her two sons and her husband” ([Ruth 1:1-5](#)).

*<sup>1</sup>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 Bethlehemjudah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons.*

*<sup>2</sup>And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehemjudah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there.*

*<sup>3</sup>And Elimelech Naomi’s husband died; and she was left, and her two sons.*

*<sup>4</sup>And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years.*

*<sup>5</sup>And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband.*

**IDEA:** How we deal with difficult situations depends on how we see God in those situations.

**PURPOSE:** To help readers realize that God doesn’t give up on those who have given up on Him.

Someone has said that “facts are stupid things until we interpret them.”

What do you think that means?

Would you agree with that statement?

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**I. The story of Ruth begins with the matter of “facts” to be interpreted, 1:1-5:**

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What are the “facts” on the macro level?

The story took place during the period of history when “judges ruled.” What does that tell you about the period?

The weather worked against the people. Famine struck the region of Bethlehem.

What are the “facts” on the personal level of one particular family?

A couple, Elimelech and Naomi, and their two boys moved to Moab, about 40 miles east of Bethlehem, to survive the famine. What can you imagine about their lives in Moab?

While they were in Moab, tragedy struck. For reasons we don't know, the husband and the two sons who married there, died.

What is it like to lose your husband to death?

Worse, the two sons also died. They were not older men who had lived full lives and had accomplished much. They were younger men in their prime and neither of them had produced children when death took them.

Can you imagine the emotional pain and loss Naomi experienced after losing all three men in her life?

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What did this mean for her future in that culture?

## II. How did Naomi interpret the facts of her life?

If you are asked, “What’s the truth about you,” how would you respond?

Did Naomi give up on God? No, she took him seriously. She believed that God was the greatest presence in the universe.

At the end of the famine, the narrator says that Naomi heard that “God had visited his people in giving them bread” ([Ruth 1:6](#) - *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 how that the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread.*). How else might she have expressed what had happened?

She prayed for her two daughters-in-law, [Ruth 1:8-9](#): -

<sup>8</sup>*And Naomi said unto her two daughters in law, Go, return each to her mother's house: the LORD deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me.*

<sup>9</sup>*The LORD grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept.*

“The Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The Lord grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband.”

Do you think this was the first time she had prayed in the last ten years? She must have prayed that the famine would end and the family could return home. She must have prayed when her husband got sick. When her first son got sick, she must have prayed. Burying her second son, she must have prayed for relief from her all-powerful God. Over and over she must have prayed and made requests for things that God withheld. And yet she didn’t stop praying.

She didn’t doubt God’s power to do what he pleased, but she did doubt God’s love for her.

She prayed for the two young women but not for herself: “May the Lord deal kindly with ‘you,’ not ‘us.’”

Her interpretation is expressed clearly in [Ruth 1:13](#) - *Would ye tarry for them till they were grown? would ye stay for them from having husbands? nay, my daughters; for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD is gone out against me.* and [20](#): - *And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me.*

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“...my daughters, it grieves me very much that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me!”

To the women of Bethlehem she said, “Do not call me ‘Naomi;’ call me ‘mara’ for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.”

Naomi concluded that God hated her. It was his prerogative to hate anyone he wanted to hate.

We can understand her sorrow for she has lost both her husband and her sons but there is no point in blaming God! *We can never expect to bring back anything productive from our sojourn into Moab.* Above all things, the Lord desires a relationship with us. Naomi may have come back empty and in bitterness, but that is not how things would end. Having returned she would once again soon see the blessing of the Lord. It is also appropriate that they should return at the beginning of the barley season, as this was the season of firstfruits. Though bitter they would soon see new life!