

RUTH

A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 1

- Vv. 1-5 *Ten tragic years in Moab.* Naomi with Elimelech, her husband, and her two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, left Bethlehem-judah when the famine in the land was so severe that they were unable to maintain themselves any longer in Israel. As the Scripture says, they dwelt there about ten years. In that time Elimelech died. Mahlon and Chilion married, Chilion to Orpah and Mahlon to Ruth. Both Mahlon and Chilion died, thus Naomi was left alone with her two widowed daughters-in-law.
- Vv. 6-14 *Orpah left behind in Moab.* Naomi was determined to return to the home she had left in Israel at Bethlehem-judah. She encouraged both her daughters-in-law to remain in Moab. Orpah decided this was best for her and kissed Naomi, parting from her.
- Vv. 15-22 *Ruth and Naomi return to Bethlehem.* Ruth's famous articulation of her decision has been an encouragement to many, especially to a man and his wife when they exchange their vows. The two widowed women thus made their lonely way across Jordan to the west and came to Naomi's home in Bethlehem-judah. There was a love between them which made them inseparable.

LESSONS FOR LEARNING

1. *No bread in the "house of bread."* Bethlehem means "house of bread." There was a famine in the land, and there was no bread in the "house of bread." Life's

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situations are often similar to this. The title of a place or a person may belie the truth of the matter. "Professors are not always possessors" is a proverbial statement. They may profess truth but not possess truth. Kings are not always rulers. They may be ruled by vile passions. Churches are not always filled with people who are "called out," the root meaning of *ecclesia*. It is ironic that people living in the place signifying the house of bread had to flee to a foreign country in order to find something to eat.

2. "*Thy God shall be my God.*" Ruth had found more in Naomi than a concerned and conscientious mother-in-law. By her association with Elimelech's family, especially her marriage to Mahlon, she had come to the point where she was willing to leave her family, her people, and her pagan gods. When such firm foundations are laid for marriage and family life, all around is happiness.
3. *Call me "Mara."* When Naomi came home to Bethlehem-judah, many older members of the community remembered her and welcomed her back. Since she came home alone—widowed and without sons—they asked if it really were Naomi. It was hard to believe that she had suffered such losses. In answer she replied, "Call me not Naomi, call me Mara." The Hebrew word, *Mara*, means bitter. She felt God had dealt bitterly with her. A similar fate may await many Christians, but all need to remember that the child whom a father loves he chastens. Even though we may feel God has dealt bitterly with us, we should praise His holy name.

CHAPTER ONE

Ruth Comes to Bethlehem 1:1-22

Introduction to the Life and Times of Ruth 1:1-7

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 Beth-lehem-judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons.

2 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 Beth-lehem-judah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there.

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

4 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 dwelt there about ten years.

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

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.

7 Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah.

1. What time is described in Ruth? 1:1

Ruth is attached to other well-known events by the definite statement "in the days when judges judged." It is assigned to the period of the judges generally. "A famine in the land," i.e., in the land of Israel and not merely in the neighborhood of Bethlehem is the import of

a second introductory statement. The time of this famine cannot be determined with certainty, although it seems very natural to connect it with the devastation of the land by the Midianites (Judges 6); and there are several things which favor this. For example, giving consideration to the marriages mentioned in the last chapter, the events are pushed back to the middle of the period of the judges, and no period fits better than the period of Gideon.

2. *Do the names of the characters explain the narrative?*

1:2

(1) Elimelech, *God is King*; (2) Naomi, *the gracious*; (3) Mahlon, *the weakly*; and (4) Chilion, *pinning* are genuine Hebrew names; whereas the names of the Moabish women, Orpah and Ruth, who were married to Elimelech's sons, cannot be satisfactorily explained from the Hebrew. The meaning given to Orpah, "turning back," is very arbitrary; and the derivation of Ruth from a word for "a friend," is quite uncertain. According to 4:10, Ruth was the wife of the elder son, Mahlon. The names do not really explain the narrative. They are genuine names; and if any further information is gathered from them, it is coincidental to the real historical message of the narrative.

3. *Why were they called Ephrathites?* 1:2

They were residents of Bethlehem; and the old name for Bethlehem was *Ephratha*, as "Queen City" was for Cincinnati. The name appears again and again as a reference to Bethlehem. Micah speaks of Bethlehem Ephratha (5:2). An explanation of the meaning of the name is given in the account of the death of Benjamin near this spot. As the record says: "Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (the same is Bethlehem)" (Genesis 35:19).

4. *What was the route from Bethlehem to Moab? 1:2b*

They might have gone over the Jordan River around the north end of the Dead Sea or through the Negeb around the south end of the Dead Sea. Since no mention is made of their taking a boat across the Dead Sea, it was not likely that this was their means of making the journey. A trip around the south end would lead them through an area which was very hot and arid, and it is reasonable to doubt their going this way. By going around the north end of the Dead Sea, they would have entered rather quickly into the territory where they would be among members of the tribe of Judah, and it is best to think of their going in this direction.

5. *What was the danger of this move to Elimelech's sons? 1:4*

He was taking his family into a pagan country. The young men were of marriageable age, and there was a danger of their marrying pagan wives. This they did. Under usual circumstances these wives would have a great influence upon the young men, running almost always to the point of leading them away from the faith of their parents. In fact such was so often the case that God forbade the Israelites to marry among the Canaanite people into whose midst they came.

6. *How long did they sojourn there? 1:4*

They were in Moab long enough for the boys to mature, marry, and expire. All of this occurred in about ten years. Since all these events occurred in such a short span of time and turned out to be very tragic, Naomi said God had dealt bitterly with her and afflicted her (verses 20, 21). These ten years were very significant; and although they were rather few in number, they must have dragged slowly by for the lonely Naomi.

7. *Why was there a famine in Judah and not in Moab?*

1:6

If the famine were inflicted by the Midianites, Moab would not have been affected. The terrain of the two areas was not particularly different. The latitude of Moab and Judah was almost the same, the two areas being parallel and directly across the Dead Sea from each other. Since the Moabites were not a part of the commonwealth of Israel, the Midianites would have little reason to attack them. The Midianites were sent as a plague against the Israelites, who had turned their backs on God.

8. *Why did the daughters-in-law start to return with Naomi?* 1:7

They were somewhat obligated to care for their aged relative. More than this, they were attracted to the Israelite way of life. In addition, any change of scenery may have been welcome to them. Normally young people are of an adventurous spirit, and it would be a new experience for them. The trip from Moab to Judah must have been emotion-packed, as Ruth and Orpah were leaving families behind; but it also was filled with anticipation as the young women especially looked forward to a new phase of their lives.

Ruth's Determination to Remain With Naomi 1:8-18

8 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.

9 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.

10 And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people.

11 And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with me? are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?

12 Turn again, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say, I have hope, if I should have a husband also tonight, and should also bear sons;

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.

14 And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law; but Ruth clave unto her.

15 And she said, Behold thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister-in-law.

16 And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:

17 Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me.

18 When she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.

9. *Why did Naomi ask each of her daughters-in-law to return "to her mother's house"?* 1:8

They would need the maternal protection since their husbands were dead. By referring to the mother's house instead of the father's house, Naomi may have indicated the girls were without fathers. If so, they had suffered tragic losses in the early deaths not only of their husbands,

but also of their fathers. Even if the fathers were alive, Naomi may have mentioned the mothers on account of the close ties of the women with their mothers.

10. *What kind of wives had Orpah and Ruth been? 1:8*

They had been kind, good, and loving. No reason is given to the Bible student to believe the suggestion of their being wicked women and occasioning the deaths of their husbands. Some believe Judah received this kind of impression from the associations of his sons with Tamar and thus procrastinated in giving his youngest son to her as her husband. Still more believe Onan was possessed of this same fear of Tamar. The Bible narrative is clear, however, in attributing the death of both Er and Onan to their own wickedness (Genesis 38:7, 9). Judah's procrastination in giving Shelah to Tamar as her husband should rather be attributed to his being dilatory. Certainly nothing in the account of the lives of Ruth and Orpah suggest their being wicked and occasioning the deaths of their husbands, Mahlon and Chilion. All of the record of their lives is good.

11. *What is the meaning of the remark about "the hand of the Lord"? 1:13*

Naomi felt the losses were punishment from God. Most people quickly jump to the same conclusion when they suffer losses. Job's friends accused him of doing evil and thus receiving punishment from the hand of God. The Apostles thought the man born blind must have sinned and received his blindness as a punishment from God (John 9:1 ff.). Since Naomi had lost her husband and her two sons after having fled from their home on account of a famine, she believed God was against her.

12. *Why did Ruth wish to return with Naomi? 1:16*

Naomi had simply the earthly prosperity of her daughter-in-law in her mind. With Ruth, however, it was evidently not merely strong affection and attachment

by which she felt herself drawn to her mother-in-law. She wished to live and die with her. There was a leaning of her heart towards the God of Israel and His laws, of which she herself was probably not yet fully conscious. She had acquired this faith in her married relation. It was her earnest wish never to be separated from Naomi and her God.

13. *From where did Ruth obtain her power of expression?*
1:16, 17

She had been accustomed to hearing similar expressions of love and devotion from her new family. Some may think her expression was inspired of the Holy Spirit. God must have been pleased with her statement of her faith and desire, but nothing in the narrative suggests Ruth's being overpowered by the Spirit of God and enabled to give an expression beyond what was natural to her. Her pleasant associations with Mahlon and his family brought these thoughts to her mind.

14. *What was the effect of the intermarriage on the two young women?* 1:17, 18

They had been brought out of idolatry. Orpah was not as devoted as Ruth, but she had at least begun to find her way out of the pagan society in which she had been reared. Ruth's faith was deep enough to cause her to leave her family behind, to go out of her native country into a strange land, and to seek a new life in a community where she had no prospect of happy married life. Her experience as the wife of Mahlon had brought a big change in her life.

Ruth's Arrival in Bethlehem 1:19-22

19 So they two went until they came to Beth-lehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Beth-lehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi?

20 And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me.

21 I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?

22 So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Beth-lehem in the beginning of barley harvest.

15. *How did Naomi contrast her return with her departure? 1:20*

The whole town of Bethlehem seemed to be excited at Naomi's return, but we suppose it was the women of the city in particular. They were not as surprised to see Naomi was still alive and had come back again as to see her returning in so mournful a condition. She was a solitary widow, without either husband or sons. Naomi replied, "Call me not *Naomi* (i.e. gracious), but *Mara* (the bitter one; i.e., who has experienced bitterness)." She said she went away full and Jehovah had made her come back again empty. She did not mean she had been "full" of riches, money and property but in the possession of a husband and two sons. She had been a rich mother. Now she was deprived of all that makes a mother's heart rich. She was bereft of both husband and sons. She felt Jehovah had testified against her by word and deed (see Exodus 20:16; I Samuel 1:6).

16. *In what season was the return to Bethlehem? 1:22*

It was the harvest time. Barley was the first crop harvested by the people of the land. When the harvest began, the people of Israel were commanded to bring a sheaf of the firstfruits to the priest. He was to wave the

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sheaf before the Lord on the day after the sabbath, and the people were to offer a he-lamb without blemish for a burnt offering unto the Lord (Leviticus 23:10-12). Since so many of the events recorded in Ruth occurred during the time of the barley harvest, it was customary to read the little book as the people celebrated the feast of Pentecost, the feast which came fifty days after the passover. This statement in the closing verse of chapter one opens the way for telling of events which happened in the barley fields where Ruth worked after she came to Bethlehem-judah.

TEN QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER 1

1. Where was Naomi's home in Israel?
2. What was the name of Naomi's husband?
3. What were the names of the two sons of Naomi?
4. What were the names of the two women of Moab whom Naomi's sons married?
5. How long was Naomi in Moab?
6. Did Orpah return to Bethlehem with Naomi?
7. What is the meaning of the word *Naomi*?
8. What name did Naomi ask the people of Bethlehem to call her?
9. What is the meaning of the word *Mara*?
10. What time of year was it when Naomi returned to Bethlehem?

A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 2

- Vv. 1- 7 *Ruth gleaning in the field of Boaz.* Provision was made in Israel for the poor and widowed to glean the fields for their sustenance. Land owners were instructed not to reap wholly the corners of their fields. They were not to