

Women's Bible Study

Ruth 1:1-5

The book of Ruth is sandwiched between Judges and 1 Samuel, acting as an appendix to Judges and an introduction to 1st and 2nd Samuel. Ruth is the shortest of the historical books and at its conclusion, it contains the genealogy of Jesus. God uses all things for His glory – including an unsuspecting foreigner from a heathen land! The exact time Ruth was written and the author of Ruth is somewhat uncertain. We have a general period of time that the writings of Ruth took place during the days when the judges ruled and during a time of severe famine. There are three possibilities of authorship: Hezekiah, Ezra and Samuel, with most theologians agreeing on Samuel as the author. With this bit of background information, let's begin our study.

Ru 1:1-2 Now it came about in the days when the judges governed, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the land of Moab with his wife and his two sons. ² And the name of the man [was] Elimelech, and the name of his wife, Naomi; and the names of his two sons [were] Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah. Now they entered the land of Moab and remained there.

When – The days when the judges governed.

Where – Bethlehem in Judah and the land of Moab

Who – Elimelech (el-ee-meh'-lek), Naomi, Mahlon (makh-lone') and Chilion (kil-yone') – a family from Bethlehem

The setting of this book quickly moves from Bethlehem to Moab. There was a famine in the land, a judgment on the Jewish nation from God foretold in Leviticus chapter 26.

Le 26:19-20 'And I will also break down your pride of power; I will also make your sky like iron and your earth like bronze. ²⁰ 'And your strength shall be spent uselessly, for your land shall not yield its produce and the trees of the land shall not yield their fruit.

During this time of famine, Elimelech chose to relocate his family to a more fertile area – Moab, a country south-east of Judah (Palestine). This was in order to provide for his family. Here's a thought to consider: on one hand this move seems good in the caring of his family. Yet, it begs the question of perhaps trying to get by with less and trusting God more. Sometimes necessity dictates a move or change in direction, yet, not always. Moving to a land which was known to worship heathen Gods would directly influence Elimelech's family. Waiting patiently upon God's provision and answers is a choice we can all make.

Do we easily become discontent with our circumstances? Do we hastily try to fix things on our own? Do we prayerfully consider if there is truly a call to change direction or does our trust in God need to grow?

Bring these questions even closer to your own personal circumstances. Think! Sometimes, when we choose to make a change which seems for the better, we are avoiding a deeper problem. For instance, I heard a conversation between two individuals where one was determined to move out of state because it was becoming too liberal. This may be true, however, the opportunity to share truth becomes greater when we are surrounded by unbelief. Did Jesus hang around only those who thought like he did? Could the real problem reside in our own discomfort or disconnect with a church family to

encourage us? Are we chasing after the hollow promise that ‘things will be better’ in general if we make a move?

We do have freedoms to make decisions we think are best but let’s not make choices based on discontent. God placed each of us right where He wants us and He will use our circumstances for His glory if we are obedient to His calling. This can be applied in many different areas of life – our families, our careers, the number of children we may or may not have, our relationships, our geographical location, our health, the home in which we live, and on and on. We can choose to trust that God will use us where He put us; He will provide for us and care for us if we sincerely desire to follow Him.

La 3:25 The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the person who seeks Him.

Mt 6:26 "Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and [yet] your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?"

The *Family Bible Notes* says: “To remove, from a regard to worldly circumstances merely, out of a land of religious light and privileges to a land of darkness and idolatry, is a course full of danger, and likely to terminate in distress.”

As we continue in the next verse of Ruth, we indeed see that grief entered into Elimelech’s family.

Ru 1:3-4 Then Elimelech, Naomi’s husband, died; and she was left with her two sons. 4 And they took for themselves Moabite women [as] wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. And they lived there about ten years.

There is no exact time frame to follow regarding Elimelech’s death. It may have been shortly after the family arrived in Moab. Naomi was left with her two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. We are only somewhat familiar with the impact that Elimelech’s death would have on his family. We need to step back in time and culture to fully appreciate the dire circumstance this mother found herself in.

According to *The Complete Guide to the Bible*, written by Stephen M. Miller, “Widows, along with orphans and immigrants, were among the most vulnerable people in Bible times. It was a man’s world. Women were minors in a court of law – like kids today. Women were also the property of men – fathers, husbands, or sons. So women generally weren’t allowed to own property or conduct business. They weren’t considered capable of that since their education was typically limited to household matters: cooking, sewing, and hauling water.”

No matter the culture we live in or the circumstances we find ourselves, whether in trouble because of our own poor choices or being disciplined through God’s love, He has promised to care for His children. God will guide us through the greatest difficulties – always for His glory.

Ps 34:4, 19 I sought the LORD, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears.¹⁹ Many are the afflictions of the righteous; But the LORD delivers him out of them all.

Heb 12:11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

Do we hold on to God's promises even when our own circumstances seem dire?
 We are never beyond God's reach if we seek Him. No trouble or problem takes God by surprise. We can always find peace and security as we seek to follow Him.

Naomi finds herself a widowed mother of two sons. Ruth 1:4 gives us information that her sons seemed to have integrated fairly well into a society that did not honor God. In Bethlehem, the family had followed Jewish law and at least Naomi had continued on in that belief enough for Ruth to take notice later in this chapter.

Perhaps without strong leadership from their father Elimelech, Mahlon and Chilion had forgotten or decided to forego the teaching of their God. If we have been blessed with family, it is extremely important to consider the time we have with them as an opportunity to teach them by our speech and our example, of God truths.

Mahlon and Chilion married Orpah and Ruth – Moabite women. Reading the Strong's Hebrew Dictionary definition of the word 'took' translated from nasa' is interesting. There are several applications but what stood out to me were the words 'accept' and 'yield'. These descriptions caused me to consider the importance of who we constantly place around us and the influence of culture. While we need to be out in the world, the necessity to guard against the enticement of sin is of utmost importance. It is easy to begin to think differently even without our immediate notice. Jewish law stated it was a grievance against God for Mahlon and Chilion to marry outside of their belief.

Deuteronomy 7:3-4 "Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. "For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you, and He will quickly destroy you.

'Them' refers to the foreign nations which were known to worship heathen gods. The nation of Israel was told to have nothing to do with them, 'make no covenants with them and show no favor to them' (Deuteronomy 7:1-2).

Ezra 9:1 Now when these things had been completed, the princes approached me, saying, "The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, according to their abominations, [those] of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites.

If you have spent time with children that are school age, you have certainly witnessed the surprising words and actions they repeat that they've been exposed to on the playground. Often, they are unaware what inappropriate words or actions even mean, they have just been influenced and are copying what they see to fit in. Influence happens quickly. Consider the impact of a television show or movie. Children, and sometimes adults, quickly pick up on a phrase or event and repeat what they've seen and heard. If you have worked outside the home, you understand how easy it is for mannerisms to 'rub off' on you. 'Worldly' behaviors can be adopted into our lifestyle if we are constantly surrounded by them. It is imperative that we fight against their influence. We do not and should not live in a protective bubble, but we must guard that our awareness does not become dull.

Have you been negatively influenced? How do you stay aware so this doesn't happen? Are you careful to guard your heart or are you careless in choosing to constantly being exposed to things that dishonor God?

We can quickly think that we are impervious to poor influence in our walk. Years ago, one of my children began picking up an attitude. With this attitude was the rolling of the eyes which was done as a definite sign of disrespect against authority. Of course,

this child was disciplined for this behavior – several times and over what seemed to be an agonizingly long period. To my dismay, unbeknownst to me, I had picked up this same expression from him. I didn't even realize it until I was in the front yard working with my husband and he said something to me that apparently I didn't agree with or didn't like. I rolled my eyes at my husband, which he didn't see, fortunately. One of my neighbors however, who had been talking with us, did see my rude expression. Needless to say I was embarrassed, humiliated and horrified and apologies followed. I had not meant to be disrespectful to my husband, but had picked up on the expression I had seen so often in our child! Influenced – guilty as charged.

Back to our account of Ruth. After about ten years, we read in the next verse of this section that Mahlon and Chilion died.

Ru 1:5 Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died; and the woman was bereft of her two children and her husband.

According to some commentaries, the death of Naomi's sons may have been judgement upon them for marrying women who were not Israelites. In any case, in the course of ten years, Naomi is without her husband and sons and in a place of strangers. This situation truly is desperate in that time with no means of support and no males in the family to provide.

Fast forward this account of extreme calamity in Naomi's life and we know God is working all things out for His good and will use her to glorify Himself. This should cause us to remember the lovingkindness of God towards His children even in their often futile attempts at following Him. He does have a plan in spite of our poor judgement and weakness. Our sin is not bigger than God's grace. Jeremiah reminds the Israelites of this in his letter sent from Jerusalem to those who were captive in Babylon. The Israelites are warned to beware of being deceived in **Jeremiah 29:8-9**. Then they are reminded that God is continuing to work in their lives and will bless them, in verses **11-13**.

God is always faithful to bring about His perfect plan. In the most difficult of circumstances, comfort can always be found in God. Even in Naomi's extreme condition of sorrow, God is working. He is preparing a young widow's heart to express compassion and care.