

Ruth 1

Life hurts. There's nothing very profound about that statement. Anyone can see the pain and suffering that surround us. A five year old dies from an unintentional gunshot wound, a mother develops cancer, a father of five loses his job, and the list goes on. The existence of evil and suffering in the world can keep us from trusting God. "Why would an all-powerful God allow so much pain and suffering in the world?" we may ask. It is a fair question.

Have you ever felt that God is against you because your world is crumbling around you? As you read the first chapter of the book of Ruth, try to put yourself in Naomi's place.

Getting Oriented

The period in which the events of recorded in the book of Ruth (the time in which the judges ruled) are among the worst in Israel's history. Like the period of decline within the ancient Roman Empire, the Israelite nation began to crumble from within. The book of Judges repeatedly states that during this time "everyone did as he saw fit". As each family or group fought for its rights alone, the society became fractured.

The book of Judges runs downhill, from bad to worse. The last five chapters contain some of the ugliest stories in the Bible – tales of homosexual assault, idolatry, civil war, thievery, rape and murder. No enemy does all this: Israelites do it to each other. Clearly, the exalted nation of Israel, God's chosen people, has lost its sense of direction. The book of Ruth shines like a beautiful diamond against this bleak background.

Read Ruth 1

Key Terms

v 2 – **Moab:** located east of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea.

v 2 – **Naomi:** means "pleasant, lovely, delightful".

v 2 – **Ephrathites:** Ephrath was an earlier name for Bethlehem.

v 8 – **LORD:** personal name of God meaning "I am who I am" (Exodus 3:14); The God who is actively present with his people.

v 8 – **kindness:** The Hebrew term "hesed" means loyal love based upon faithfulness and commitment.

v 11 – **sons who could become your husbands:** The Old Testament Law stated that if a man died, his brother had to marry the widow to protect her and carry on the family name. Naomi's comment here ("sons who could grow up to be your husbands") refers to *levirate marriage*, the obligation of a dead man's brother to care for the widow (Deuteronomy

25:5-10). This law kept the widow from poverty and provided a way for the family name of the dead husband to continue.

v 20 – **Mara:** bitter, sad.

v 20 – **Almighty:** “The Mountain One” suggesting unlimited power.

v 22 – **Bethlehem:** “house of bread”; located about five miles southwest of Jerusalem. The town was surrounded by lush fields and olive groves. Its harvests were abundant. The population of the town would not have exceeded a couple of hundred in most periods and was likely considerably less at this time.

Exploring the Passage

1. Describe Naomi’s condition after ten years in Moab?

NOTE: There was almost nothing worse than being a widow in the ancient world. Widows were taken advantage of or ignored. They would equate to the homeless in American society. They were almost always poverty stricken. God’s law, therefore, provided that the nearest relative of the dead husband should care for the widow; but Naomi had no relatives in Moab, and she did not know if any of her relatives were alive in Israel.

2. Are you surprised by Ruth decision to stay with her mother-in-law? Why or why not?

NOTE: Moab was one of the nations that oppressed Israel during the period of the judges (Judges 3:12), so there was hostility between the two nations.

3. Naomi said that God was against her. Was she right to think and feel this way? Why or why not?

Charting Our Course

1. How should suffering affect a person’s attitude toward God?
2. Have you ever felt empty and afflicted by God as Naomi did? How did you respond? What did God do in your situation?