

## Lesson 2 Commentary

# Day 7: Ruth and Naomi

## Ruth 1

### Introduction

During the time of the Judges, only a few Israelites trusted and followed God. The book of Ruth describes how God guided one of those believing families who lived in the humble village of Bethlehem. Boaz, a Jew, and Ruth, a Gentile, married. They became the great-grandparents of King David. Jesus Christ came from David's royal line (Matthew 1:5-16). Ruth's Gentile background reminds us that Jesus is not only the Savior of the Jews, but He is the Savior of *all* people.

Jews read the book of Ruth when they celebrate the Feast of Weeks (later known as the Feast of Pentecost). The book shows that God takes care of His people. He honors those who are committed to their families (1:7). It shows that He rewards godly character (2:11-12). It also shows how important it is to be diligent (2:6-7). Chapter 4 records the genealogy of King David (4:17-22).

### Naomi and Her Family

Naomi and Elimelech lived in Judah with their sons, Mahlon and Kilion. During a severe famine, Elimelech chose to move the family to Moab. From the beginning, Moab had an uncomfortable relationship with Israel. The nation of Moab began through a shameful drunken encounter between Abraham's nephew Lot and one of Lot's daughters (Genesis 19:36-37). The Moabites settled in land across the Dead Sea from Judah. Later, the Moabite King Balak asked a false prophet, Balaam, to curse the Israelites (Numbers 22:4-6, 21-35). God prevented Balaam from cursing His people. But Balaam did succeed in leading the Israelites into sexual immorality and idolatry. Falling to these temptations proved devastating for the Israelites (Numbers 25). King David later conquered the Moabites (2 Samuel 8:2).

Elimelech and his two grown sons died in Moab. Naomi was left alone with her Moabite daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah. Naomi heard that the famine in Israel was over, so she decided to return to Judah. Naomi urged Ruth and Orpah to go back to their mothers' homes. It was clear that these two women had been faithful wives and daughters-in-law who loved her (verse 8).

Unless women were independently wealthy during this time, they needed males—a father, a brother, or a husband—to support them. All three women would have needed such help. Naomi painted a hopeless picture of their future. But both Ruth and Orpah wanted to remain with her.

Naomi referred to Moses' law about widows marrying the brothers of their dead husbands. "If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. And the first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel" (Deuteronomy 25:5-6). Naomi said she had no way of providing husbands for them. She said that God's hand was against her. However, we will see in the next chapter that God did care for Naomi through her faithful, loving daughter-in-law and a kind relative.



**Think about** how anyone can be part of God's family. No matter how ungodly or immoral our ancestors may have been we have opportunity to follow God. Ruth had known life only in Moab. She had been raised worshiping other gods. Yet she walked away from her family and traditions to be with Naomi. She moved forward with Naomi and with Naomi's God. Her decision opened the way for her to be part of the godly line to which Jesus was born.

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### Naomi and Ruth

Naomi convinced Orpah not to go with her. But Ruth "clung to" Naomi (1:14). The Hebrew word for *cling* means "to cleave, keep close." It implies devotion and loyalty. Ruth was committed to Naomi until death, no matter what the effects were on her own life. Naomi again tried to persuade Ruth not to go with her. Perhaps

she worried that returning to Bethlehem with a Moabite daughter-in-law might cause others to judge her. However, Ruth pleaded, “Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God” (1:16). These words show clearly what it means *to cleave*. Ruth had determined to follow Naomi anywhere, knowing it included worshiping Naomi’s God (1:16-17). When she said “May the LORD do so to me,” she used the word *Yahweh* for God. Ruth had a humble fear for God and was already beginning to trust in Him.

Naomi finally accepted her decision. Together they traveled to Bethlehem. When the townspeople saw Naomi, they asked, “Is this Naomi?” Naomi asked the people to call her *Mara*, which means *bitter*, rather than Naomi, which means *pleasant*. “I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty.” Naomi was bitter, and she blamed God for her tragedy. It had indeed been severely trying to lose her husband and two sons in a strange land.



**Think about** what your faith looks like on your worst day. Naomi felt as if God were against her. In the midst of all the hardship Naomi faced in Moab, however, her life somehow pointed Ruth to God. Naomi thought that God had dealt bitterly with her. But Ruth saw Naomi’s faith and trusted Naomi’s God instead of the gods of Moab. We may wish that Naomi had shown more confidence in God. Still, isn’t it encouraging to know that even in this affliction Ruth could see God in Naomi? What Ruth saw, even on Naomi’s worst day, was enough to make her want God to be her God, too.

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In God’s providence, Ruth arrived in Bethlehem with Naomi. It was the beginning of the barley harvest, when Israel observed the Passover. As we will see in chapters 2–4, God will meet Ruth’s every need—physical as well as spiritual. His plan for her was more wonderful than anything she could have imagined.



### **Personalize the TRUTH!**

Although Naomi had lost her husband and sons, God gave her a surprising gift in her daughter-in-law, Ruth. At first, Naomi wasn’t able to recognize the gift. But Ruth’s faithfulness to stay with Naomi and accompany her to Bethlehem was God’s provision for Naomi’s future. Are you going through a hard time? What surprising gift is God giving you so you can experience His nearness and care even in the midst of your struggle and pain?

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