

The Book of Ruth¹

Lesson 1
Ruth Chapters 1 & 2

Elimelech and Naomi

Ruth 1:1 – 5

Ruth 1:1a Now it came about in the days when the judges governed, that there was a famine in the land.

The days of the judges lasted from the death of Joshua in 1407 BC to the coronation of Saul as king over the twelve tribes of Israel in 1076 BC, or 331 years. Samuel served as the last true judge of that period until he crowned Saul as king. He continued to judge for 36 years of Saul's reign.



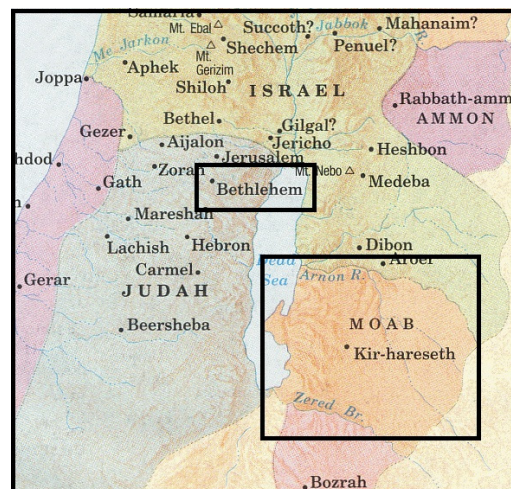
The story in the Book of Ruth occurs between the end of the Book of Judges and the beginning of the Book of 1st Samuel, most likely sometime between 1150 to 1100 BC.



Ruth 1:1b And a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the land of Moab with his wife and his two sons. 1:2 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.

Because of the famine, Elimelech and his wife, Naomi, move from Bethlehem to Moab with their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. The passage identifies the family as Ephrathites, one of the Israelite groups closely associated with the long history of the city of Bethlehem, the place where Jacob buried Rachel when she died after giving birth to Benjamin in 1940 BC.

The city of Bethlehem lies on the northwest side of the Dead Sea and the country of Moab lies to the southeast side of the Dead Sea, between the Arnon and Zered Rivers. Even though the country of Moab lies just 30 miles from Bethlehem across the Dead Sea, the family must travel around the Sea either to the north or to the south, making it a journey of 60 to 80 miles depending on the route.



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^{Ruth 1:3} Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left with her two sons. ^{1:4} 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. ^{1:5} Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died; and the woman was bereft of her two children and her husband.

Once in Moab, the boys take two Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth, and the family remains there for about 10 years. The Moabites are descendants of Lot, Abraham's nephew. Two of Lot's daughters think Sodom's destruction in 2092 BC is the destruction of all humanity and they devise a plan to continue life on earth. For the next two nights, when Lot is drunk, they lie with him to conceive children. One of the daughters names her new son, Moab and the other Ammon. Both remain in the area where they run for safety when they escape from Sodom. Their descendants grow in great numbers. By the end of a decade of life in Moab, the two boys and their father have died, leaving Naomi with her two daughters-in-law and no one to provide for their daily needs and provisions.

Ruth's Loyalty

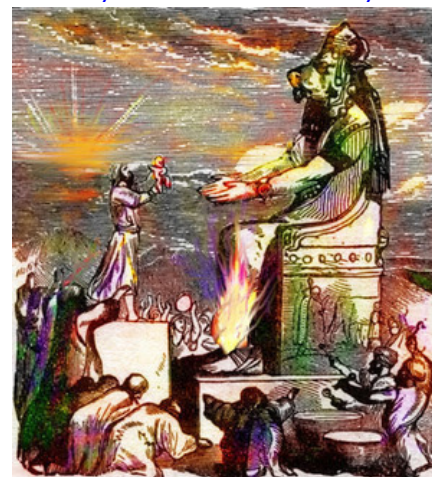
Ruth 1:6 - 18

^{Ruth 1:6} Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the land of Moab, for she had heard in the land of Moab that the LORD had visited His people in giving them food. ^{1:7} So she departed from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. ^{1:8} And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me." ^{1:9} "May the LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband." Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. ^{1:10} And they said to her, "No, but we will surely return with you to your people." ^{1:11} But Naomi said, "Return, my daughters. Why should you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?" ^{1:12} "Return, my daughters! Go, for I am too old to have a husband. If I said I have hope, if I should even have a husband tonight and also bear sons, ^{1:13} would you therefore wait until they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters; for it is harder for me than for you, for the hand of the LORD has gone forth against me."

Struggling to survive, Naomi decides to return to Bethlehem in Judea area because roasters indicate that the famine is over and the Lord has supplied ample food for the people living there. Somewhere on the journey, Naomi encourages the two daughters to return to Moab to live with their relatives. It is an emotional time for all the women. Orpah returns to Moab to live, but Ruth stays with Naomi and they continue the journey to Bethlehem.

^{Ruth 1:14} And they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. ^{1:15} Then she said, "Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law."

Orpah returns to her people and her gods. By the time of this story, the Moabites had abandoned the God of Abraham and Lot to worship the god Chemosh. His name means "the destroyer," and in times of distress and crises, he required a human sacrifice to gain his favor. Children were the primary offerings to this god. By the time Moses wrote Deuteronomy in 1445 BC, the Moabites were forbidden to enter the assembly around the Tabernacle



because of their despicable human sacrifice practices.² Although the Moabites called their god Chemosh, the rest of the people in the area, specifically the Canaanites and the Phoenicians, called him Molech. The Moabites had forsaken the true God for the pagan god of the descendants of Noah's grandson, Canaan.³ In 1445 BC, the Lord instructed Joshua to destroy the Canaanites but he failed in the task.⁴ Thirty-eight years earlier in 1483 BC, Moses' recording of the Levitical law forbade the Israelites from passing their children through the fire of Molech as a sacrifice.⁵ When Orpah leaves Naomi, she leaves the true God for a false god.

Ruth 1:16 But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or turn back 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. 1:17 "Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if *anything but* death parts you and me." 1:18 When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

Ruth's choice to stay with Naomi takes her to the true God. Many couples have repeated Ruth's words in many different contexts.

"Do not urge me to leave you or turn back 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. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if *anything but* death parts you and me."

Naomi cannot counter the compelling words of Ruth, so the two continue on the road to Bethlehem together.

Return to Bethlehem

Ruth 1:19 - 22

Ruth 1:19a So they both went until they came to Bethlehem.

The first name of Bethlehem was Ephrath. 1st Chronicles 2:51 indicates that Salma was the father, or founder of the city of Bethlehem around 1440 BC. It was named Epharath after Salma's wife, Ephratah.⁶ Some time over the next 300 years, it became Bethlehem. It would be the birth place of both David and Jesus. Naomi is a direct descendant of Salma and his father, Caleb, who was one of the twelve spies selected by Moses to search out the Promised Land in 1473 BC. Only Caleb and Joshua voted to go into the land and they were the two spies allowed to actually enter the land 38 years later in 1445 BC. Naomi is a special person in town and her arrival stirs up the entire city. "Is this Naomi?" the people ask. A decade has passed since she was in town and most likely, the people have forgotten about her.

² Deuteronomy 23:3 - No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the LORD; none of their *descendants*, even to the tenth generation, shall ever enter the assembly of the LORD.

³ Genesis 10:6

⁴ Exodus 23:23; Numbers 33:52, 53; Deut. 20:16-17

⁵ Leviticus 18:21 - Neither shall you give any of your offspring to offer them to Molech, nor shall you profane the name of your God; I am the LORD.

⁶ 1 Chronicles 2:51-54 - Salma the father of Bethlehem *and* Hareph the father of Beth-gader. And Shobal the father of Kiriath-jearim had sons: Haroeh, half of the Manahathites, and the families of Kiriath-jearim: the Ithrites, the Puthites, the Shumathites, and the Mishraites; from these came the Zorathites and the Eshtaulites. The sons of Salma *were* Bethlehem and the Netophathites, Atroth-beth-joaab and half of the Manahathites, the Zorites.

^{Ruth 1:19b} And it came about when they had come to Bethlehem, that all the city was stirred because of them, and the women said, "Is this Naomi?" ^{1:20} And she said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. ^{1:21} "I went out full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?"

The people know Naomi's name but she wants to be called Mara, which means bitterness, sadness, or misfortune. In that ten year period, misfortune had plagued Naomi, and by telling the people to call her Mara, she is communicating in one word her life's story. She blames her misfortune on the Lord. "I went out full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?" Naomi cannot see any good in the decision made ten years before to travel to Moab. Those ten years had provided only heartache and pain in the end. But now they have arrived at barley harvest and they will be able to glean from the fields enough to eat for the foreseeable future.

^{Ruth 1:22} So Naomi returned, and with her Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, who returned from the land of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

The barley harvest occurs about one month before the wheat harvest. Barley was primarily used as horse feed.⁷ However, the poorest people used it to make bread.⁸ Barley harvest occurs in the month of April according to our Gregorian Calendar.⁹ The first 10% of the barley harvest was to be given to the Lord and the outer edges of the fields were to be left for the poorest people to glean.¹⁰ Naomi and Ruth have returned to Bethlehem with nothing and the barley harvest offers them the opportunity to gather food for their needs.

Kinsman Boaz

Ruth 2:1 - 10

^{Ruth 2:1} Now Naomi had a kinsman of her husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. ^{2:2} And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "Please let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after one in whose sight I may find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter." ^{2:3} So she departed and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers; and she happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech. ^{2:4} Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem and said to the reapers, "May the LORD be with you." And they said to him, "May the LORD bless you."

⁷ 1 Kings 4:28 - They also brought barley and straw for the horses and swift steeds to the place where it should be, each according to his charge.

⁸ Judges 7:13 - When Gideon came, behold, a man was relating a dream to his friend. And he said, "Behold, I had a dream; a loaf of barley bread was tumbling into the camp of Midian, and it came to the tent and struck it so that it fell, and turned it upside down so that the tent lay flat." 2 Kings 4:42 - Now a man came from Baal-shalishah, and brought the man of God bread of the first fruits, twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. And he said, "Give *them* to the people that they may eat."

⁹ The Hebrew Calendar from the days of Moses until 320 AD was a lunar calendar consisting of 354 ½ days rather than 365 ¼ days in the Gregorian calendar. Because it was 11 days shorter than the Gregorian Calendar, the Hebrew Calendar would cycle through all the seasons over a period of 33.3 years. Some commentaries say that barley harvest occurred at the time of the Passover, but that occurred only once every 33.3 years on the Hebrew Calendar until 320 AD when the Jewish Priest, Hillel, added a 13th month every 3rd year to keep the Hebrew Calendar in line with the seasons and Passover, as well as all the other festivals in close proximity to their original setting or establishment.

¹⁰ Leviticus 23:10 - Speak to the sons of Israel, and say to them, "When you enter the land which I am going to give to you and reap its harvest, then you shall bring in the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest."

Naomi sends Ruth to glean in the barley field. By chance, she goes to the field of Boaz, a kinsman of Naomi's deceased husband, Elimelech. In the Scripture, the word kinsman usually refers to the closest blood relative. In this case, Boaz is not the closest, but he is most likely the wealthiest.

In the Jewish system, when a woman's husband died and there was no male heir, it was the responsibility of the closest male relative to marry the widow and raise their first male child, giving him her dead husband's name. This man was the dead husband's "goel" or kinsman redeemer.¹¹ The "goel" or kinsman redeemer was also responsible to redeem the estate of the relative if he sold his property because of poverty.¹² He was also expected to redeem the relative who sold himself into slavery to provide for his family's needs.¹³

Ruth 2:5 Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?"^{2:6} And the servant in charge of the reapers answered and said, "She is the young Moabite woman who returned with Naomi from the land of Moab."^{2:7} And she said, 'Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves.' Thus she came and has remained from the morning until now; she has been sitting in the house for a little while."^{2:8} Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Listen carefully, my daughter. Do not go to glean in another field; furthermore, do not go on from this one, but stay here with my maids."^{2:9} Let your eyes be on the field which they reap, and go after them. Indeed, I have commanded the servants not to touch you. When you are thirsty, go to the water jars and drink from what the servants draw."^{2:10} Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your sight that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?"

Once Boaz discovers the identity of Ruth, he immediately knows her story because his home is in Bethlehem and the arrival of Naomi and Ruth and their story has swept through the city.¹⁴ At this point in the story, Boaz essentially puts a hedge of protection in place to provide for Ruth and Naomi. He gives strict instructions to all his men "not to touch" her. Ruth asks Naomi to send her somewhere where she will find favor in the sight of the owner, but now she questions the owner as to why she has found favor in his sight.

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¹¹ Genesis 38:8 - Then Judah said to Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife, and perform your duty as a brother-in-law to her, and raise up offspring for your brother." Deuteronomy 25:5- 10 - When brothers live together and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be *married* outside *the family* to a strange man. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her to himself as wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. And it shall be that the first-born whom she bears shall assume the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out from Israel. But if the man does not desire to take his brother's wife, then his brother's wife shall go up to the gate to the elders and say, "My husband's brother refuses to establish a name for his brother in Israel; he is not willing to perform the duty of a husband's brother to me." Then the elders of his city shall summon him and speak to him. And *if* he persists and says, 'I do not desire to take her,' then his brother's wife shall come to him in the sight of the elders, and pull his sandal off his foot and spit in his face; and she shall declare, "Thus it is done to the man who does not build up his brother's house." And in Israel his name shall be called, "The house of him whose sandal is removed."

¹² Leviticus 25:25 - If a fellow countryman of yours becomes so poor he has to sell part of his property, then his nearest kinsman is to come and buy back what his relative has sold.

¹³ Leviticus 25:47-48 - Now if the means of a stranger or of a sojourner with you becomes sufficient, and a countryman of yours becomes so poor with regard to him as to sell himself to a stranger who is sojourning with you, or to the descendants of a stranger's family, then he shall have redemption right after he has been sold. One of his brothers may redeem him.

¹⁴ Ruth 1:19

¹⁵ Ruth 2:2

Boaz's Kindness

Ruth 2:11 - 18

^{Ruth 2:11} And Boaz answered and said to her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband has been fully reported to me, and how you left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and came to a people that you did not previously know. ^{2:12} " May the LORD reward your work, and your wages be full from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge." ^{2:13} Then she said, "I have found favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and indeed have spoken kindly to your maidservant, though I am not like one of your maidservants." ^{2:14} And at mealtime Boaz said to her, " Come here, that you may eat of the bread and dip your piece of bread in the vinegar." So she sat beside the reapers; and he served her roasted grain, and she ate and was satisfied and had some left. ^{2:15} When she rose to glean, Boaz commanded his servants, saying, "Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not insult her. ^{2:16} "And also you shall purposely pull out for her *some grain* from the bundles and leave *it* that she may glean, and do not rebuke her." ^{2:17} So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley.

Boaz's kindness towards Ruth is a direct result of her kindness to Naomi. Boaz has heard the reports and he is impressed. He shows favor to Ruth far beyond that which he would show to the others who are gleaning the grain at the edges of his field. The sheaves that are accidentally left behind are not retrieved but left for the poor also. He allows Ruth to go into the main portions of the field to gather all that she desires. What a privilege! In both cases, little remains to be gleaned from the field.

^{Ruth 2:18} And she took *it* up and went into the city, and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She also took *it* out and gave Naomi what she had left after she was satisfied.

Her first day's work yields about an ephah of grain, or about 65% of a bushel; a good days gathering for a poor person, not to mention the fact that she is allowed to eat from Boaz' table with his hired workers.

Naomi's Question

Ruth 2:19 - 23

^{Ruth 2:19} Her mother-in-law then said to her, "Where did you glean today and where did you work? May he who took notice of you be blessed." So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, "The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz." ^{2:20} And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, " May he be blessed of the LORD who has not withdrawn his kindness to the living and to the dead." Again Naomi said to her, "The man is our relative, he is one of our closest relatives."

Notice Naomi's astonishment when she learns that Ruth has worked in the field of Boaz, one of her dead husband's relatives. "It is good," Naomi says to Ruth because Ruth will be safe under his care.

^{Ruth 2:21} Then Ruth the Moabitess said, " Furthermore, he said to me, 'You should stay close to my servants until they have finished all my harvest.'" ^{2:22} And Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, "It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his maids, lest *others* fall upon you in another field." ^{2:23} So she stayed close by the maids of Boaz in order to glean until the end of the barley harvest and the wheat harvest. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

Also notice that Ruth continues to glean the grain through the completion of the barley season and the wheat harvest. Wheat was one of the finest of the grains used for food and it was harvested throughout the months of May and June. From April through June, Ruth is able to collect enough barley and wheat feed to provide for the family needs for three months.