

Ruth – Chapter 1

Introduction: Life hurts. There's nothing very profound about that statement. Anyone can see the pain and suffering that surround us. Sometimes 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? Today's story is about a woman named Naomi whose life is full of terrible losses. As you read the first chapter of the book of Ruth, try to put yourself in Naomi's place.

Key words and locations:

When the judges ruled (v 1) – time when Israel was ruled by a judge rather than a king

Famine (v 1) – time when very little rain results in no crops growing and there is a severe lack of food

Ephrathites (v 2) – Ephrath was an earlier name for Bethlehem

Naomi (v 2) – means "pleasant, lovely, delightful"

LORD (v 8) – personal name of God meaning "I am who I am"; the God who is actively present with his people.

Kindness (v 8) – here means loyal love based upon faithfulness and commitment

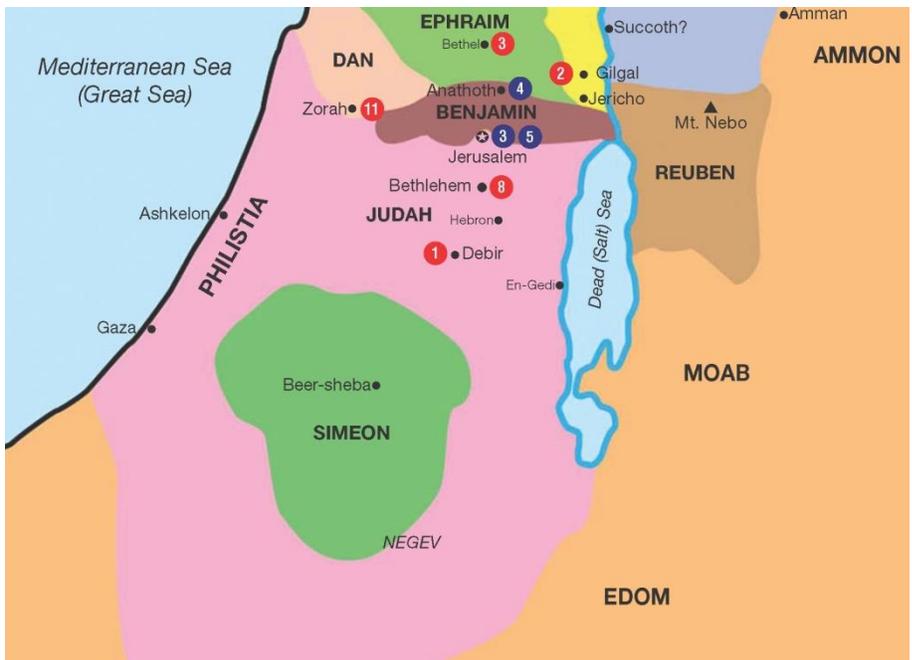
Mara (v 20) – bitter or sad

Bethlehem (v 22) – means "house of bread"; a small town of about 200 people located 8 kilometers southwest of Jerusalem. The town was surrounded by fields and olive groves and had large harvests.

Read Ruth Chapter 1:

1 In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. **2** The man's name was Elimelech, his wife's name Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there. **3** Now Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. **4** They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, **5** both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

6 When she heard in Moab that the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, Naomi and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. **7** With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of



Judah. **8** Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the LORD show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead and to me. **9** May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband." Then she kissed them and they wept aloud **10** and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people." **11** But Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? **12** Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me-- even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons-- **13** would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD's hand has gone out against me!"

14 At this they wept again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye, but Ruth clung to her. **15** "Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her." **16** But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. **17** Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me." **18** When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her. **19** So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, "Can this be Naomi?" **20** "Don't call me Naomi," she told them. "Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. **21** I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me." **22** So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.

Questions:

1. Describe Naomi's situation after ten years in Moab.

NOTE: There was almost nothing worse than being a widow in the ancient world. Widows were poor, taken advantage of, or ignored. Their status was similar to the homeless in modern American society. God's law stated that the nearest relative of the dead husband should care for the widow; but Naomi had no relatives in Moab, and she didn't know if any relatives were alive in Israel.

2. Why did Naomi suggest for her daughters-in-law to return home?
3. Are you surprised by Ruth's decision to stay with her mother-in-law? Why or why not?
NOTE: Moab was one of the nations that fought against Israel during this time, so there was hostility between the two nations.
4. How do you think Ruth's decision affected Naomi? Has anyone been like Ruth to you?
5. Ruth faced many unknowns in a foreign country. How does her example encourage you?
6. Naomi said God was against her. Was she right to think and feel this way? Why or why not?
7. Have you ever felt empty and angry at God as Naomi did? How did you respond? What did God do in your situation?
8. What time of year is it when they arrive in Bethlehem (v 22)? What could this mean?