

We have one of the most beautiful short stories of all the bible if not of all literature. Beyond a classic and heroic love story, this is a testament to the sovereignty and grace of an Almighty God, who is the author and perfecter of our faith.

Ruth 1

1 In the days when the judges ruled

This story occurs during age of the Judges from the death of Joshua to the crowning of Saul as king of Israel. This is was a desperately wicked time where God would pick certain people or judges to rise up and protect or free the people if Israel. This is where we get most of the good kid's Sunday School class. Judges is a highly recommended read.

there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah

Note the city and the tribe. Who in the Bible was born in Bethlehem (meaning House of Bread)? Who in the Bible was from the tribe of Judah?

went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons.

Moabites are descendants as a result of the incestuous relationship between Lot and his daughters. The eldest daughter brought forth a son named Moab and thus, is the father of the Moabites. The younger daughter brought forth a son and named him Ammon. He is the father of the Ammonites.

2 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. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there.

Elimelech - God his King

Naomi - Pleasant

Mahlon - Sickness

Chilion - Suffering

Ephrathites - clan within the tribe of Judah

3 But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons.

So lets review the facts:

1. A famine hits the land: If this is during the time of Judges, during mass disobedience, we can determine that this famine is a result of God's divine judgment upon the land (Deut 11:14). (Some famines were divinely appointed by God in order to bring about His will and purpose. See Gen 42:5, 45:5-8. As we read on, this famine might be both God's judgement and to advance His will.)
2. Since there was a famine that hits the area, that means there is no food.
3. Elimelech thought it will be a good idea to go into a country where there are no believers... into a country that did not worship the One True God but some demon.
4. Elimelech dies. The Bible is not clear on whether or not this is His sovereign judgement. But from this we can take that Elimelech was going to depend upon himself to provide for his family rather than depend on God (despite Elimelech means God is King). He left Israel to escape God's judgement. He ends up dead in a foreign land leaving behind his Christian wife and two sons (whether they believed or not,

Bible never says.)

4 These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years,

One to note: if you raise your children in a foreign land and they become of age, guess who they might marry? Are you moving to an area where there are no Christians to fellowship with?

I am not calling for a Christian sub-culture. Far from it. Jesus called us to be the "light of the world, salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13-14). However, if you are called into mission fields and you have a wife and a family to take care of, there are many important factors to consider. Prayerfully seek out God in His calling upon your life and in all things.

5 and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

Husband dies. Sons die. Widow in a foreign land with the only family is her Moabite daughters-in-law.

Ruth's Loyalty to Naomi

6 Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the Lord had visited his people and given them food.

God gives and takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

7 So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. 8 But 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. 9 The Lord grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!" Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.

One of the most beautiful things I can truly appreciate about Ruth is that every single time somebody prayed or blessed, they were always praying for the other person and never for themselves. When leaders blessed their flock, God instructed them to "Lord, bless them and keep them. Shine Your glory upon them. Be ever so gracious. Smile upon them. Give them peace." (Numbers 6:24-26) At the times when I am at my most desperate, I quickly grow tired of praying for God to help me. I feel so selfish in doing so. One of the very things that restores my joy is when I start to fast and pray for others. That God would take care of them. God bless them. God saves them. Just like He saved me.

10 And they said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people." 11 But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? 12 Turn back, my daughters; go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, 13 would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of

the Lord has gone out against me."

Naomi says, "I HAVE NOTHING FOR YOU. I have no more sons. I have no kin that I can recall. Where I am going, you don't want to go. Like I am stranger in this land, you will become a stranger in my land. There is nothing for you. Turn back."

I call Naomi the Anti-Evangelist. "This Christian life... God... there is nothing. Nothing to look forward to. No hope. No faith. No love. Turn back."

14 Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

There are some who think living the Christian life is attractive. That it is something that will make you be good and something that will please God enough. Orpah turned back because she didn't believe in God. Her life for God didn't sound really appealing and she made up her mind that her old life wasn't that bad.

Ruth, on the other hand, clearly and simply believed on the name of the Lord. Despite a strange land and a rapidly turning bitter old woman for a mom-in-law who is telling her otherwise, God has gotten a hold of Ruth's heart and she clings to the only thing she can: a life with God is not worth living. She compares God and His goodness to her upbringing and her way of life in Moab. There is no way she can go back into the pit of despair. She will not and cannot go back into emptiness. She will not and cannot go back into death when she has tasted and felt life from the Living God on High.

Ps 63:8 My soul clings to you. In John 20:16-17, Mary cries out "Teacher!" but Jesus steps away and tells her "Don't cling to me... I need to go to my Father so that He will now be Your Father. He will now be Your God."

My argument for this moment that Ruth truly believes that upon the Lord our God. It is in this moment, she is truly saved because she knows God as her Lord and as her Saviour.

15 And she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law."

More Naomi bitterness seeping in. Hebrews 12:15 says "***See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;***" In Deuteronomy 29:18, God warns of bitterness in just one person infecting an entire village or even the land when bitterness has seeped into someone's heart. Take Deut 32:32 into example where the Holy Spirit called all fruit from Sodom and Gomorrah "poison and their grape clusters bitter." Despite the American Evangelical's perspective on God's judgement on Sodom and Gomorrah, God makes it quite clear that their sin was simply beyond lust but pride rooted in bitterness.

16 But Ruth said, "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. 17 Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you." 18 And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.

Out of Ruth's love for God and possessing the of love of God for her mother-in-law, she absolutely clings to Naomi gives her solemn vow to never leave. Naomi's God, the Israelite's God is her God. There is no turning back.

Naomi and Ruth Return

19 So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women said, "Is this Naomi?" 20 She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. 21 I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?"

Mara - Bitter

Naomi comes back into the arms of her fellow believers and a community of like-minded Christians. Almost immediately she pours her heart out. It is more than okay to think that God has turned His back on you. David felt the same way in Psalm 22 where he cries out. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?". Remember Jesus said in Matt 6:7 "Don't let your prayers be in vain, just empty words said over and over again." There is something to be said about authentic prayers to God.

22 So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

Naomi is finally home. God has provided for all.