
Bitterness or Blessing?

Ruth 1

Be a Berean!

This morning we will be in Ruth Ch. 1: Usually when we look at the book of Ruth, we normally look at... well, Ruth and Boaz... But this morning we are going to be looking at Naomi. My wife and I listen through the Bible each year. And as I was driving to Church one day, I was listening to the book of Ruth and something popped out at me that I have never thought of before. I think it was a really good and poignant nugget from the Lord and this is what is on my heart to talk about today. Now it came to pass, in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem, Judah, went to dwell in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech, the name of his wife was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion—Ephrathites of Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to the country of Moab and remained there. Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left, and her two sons. Now they took wives of the women of Moab: the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth. And they dwelt there about ten years. Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died; so the woman survived her two sons and her husband. Ruth 1:1-5 So, in Ruth Ch 1, we see pretty quickly that - Naomi has it really rough... Vs one starts out right away by telling us there was a famine in Israel... Famines come up fairly often in the OT and we see a couple things about them: 1: At times, God uses them as punishment to chasten His people and turn their hearts back to Him... 2: God uses them to temporarily move His people to places He wants them to be: Abraham, Isaac, and the Sons of Jacob are all examples of this. Hold on to this, because it will come up later... Now, we aren't told why this particular famine came about, but we do know that because of this famine, Elimelech, Naomi and their two sons decided to move. It was so bad, in fact that they moved to the land of a people who were often in conflict with Israel: Moab. They had to start all over in an unfamiliar place with unfamiliar people - different culture, different belief structure, different gods... While there in Moab, Naomi's husband dies and leaves her with their 2 boys. Tragic! She was forced to move from her town and everything she knew, to the land of Israel's enemies, and now her husband dies... We then read that her sons married a couple Moabite women and lived 10 years and then both of her sons died. So, not only did the wives not conceive and give her grandkids for 10 years, but then her two boys die. She must be devastated... In a foreign land, no family, massive loss... heartbreaking! Then, in VS 6, We read that Naomi hears that God visited Israel and ended the famine and so she decides to return to the land of Israel. Of course, we know that though both of her daughter-in-laws initially wanted to go with her, Naomi released them and Orpah stays in Moab and the other, Ruth, clings to Naomi and makes this covenant with her. So sweet - Ruth is great! Here, we will pick it up in vs 19: Now the two of them went until they came to Bethlehem. And it happened, when they had come to Bethlehem, that all the city was excited because of them; and the women said, "Is this Naomi?" Ruth 1:19 Bethlehem is not a huge place - they would have all grown up together and this would have been big news that Naomi showed back up! Everyone in the city is excited and the women are like - "What!? Crazy! Is this really Naomi...?" Let's read Naomi's response in Vs 20: But she said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. Ruth 1:20 The people are excited to see her, but Naomi isn't having it - she's not happy at all... She tells the people "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara." Now, you may know this, but 'Naomi' means "Pleasant", "Sweet" or "My Delight". And 'Mara' means: מָרָא (mārā) Mara: Bitter / Anguished / Intense despair, distress, and anguish. Poisoned. She was named "Pleasant", "Sweet" or "My Delight" and re-names herself "Bitterness", "Anguish" and "Intense discontent". In that time, a name was like your identity... So, Why? Why would she do that? Well, she tells us exactly why in VS 20-21 But she said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord has brought me home again empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?" Ruth 1:20-21 Naomi lays out 4 reasons why she has renamed herself. "The Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me." "I went out full and the Lord has bought me back empty." "The Lord testified against me." "The Almighty has afflicted me." She throws out all these seemingly valid reasons that she is no longer Pleasant or My Delight. After all, her situation forced her to move to enemy territory. Her husband then passes away. Both her sons marry outside of Israel. No grandbabies come for 10 years. Then not one, but both of her sons die... This isn't the life she imagined, hoped for or wanted. In all these things, it seems that she is correct in saying The Almighty has dealt bitterly with her and testified against her and sent her out full and brought her back empty... We also have to understand Naomi is in a very precarious position - being a widow in that day... Her future is not looking bright. She has no husband or sons to look after her, take care of her or provide for her. She is largely at the mercy and kindness of those in her home town of Bethlehem. All of this would be on her mind and she would have been mulling it over and over as she made the trek back to her home town. And she reaches the conclusion that she is now doomed to live a life of bitterness - A life of anguish, intense despair, mental distress, and discontentment. This bitterness is like a poison to her - killing her slowly and so it is to us... You see, bitterness is a very sneaky and insidious thing. It gets in our hearts