

Ruth and Naomi return to Israel

Ruth 1

Ruth 1:1, 3, 5, 8, 9, 16

1 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 Beth-lehem-judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons.

*“There was a famine in the land — This makes it probable that the things here recorded came to pass in the days of Gideon, for that is the only time when we read of a famine in the days of the judges; namely, when the Midianites, Amalekites, &c., came and *destroyed the increase of the earth, and left no sustenance for Israel*, nor for their cattle, [Jdg 6:3-4](#)”* (Benson Commentary).

“A famine in Canaan. Elimelech removes to Moab; with Naomi his wife, and his two sons, who marry Orpah and Ruth there; and die, **Rth 1:1-5**. Naomi returns to Judah; her daughters-in-law accompany her on her way, **Rth 1:6-13**. Orpah returns home to her people and gods; Ruth remains, being converted, **Rth 1:14-18**. They come to Beth-lehem, **Rth 1:19-22**” (Matthew Poole’s Commentary).

“**1. Beth-lehem-judah**] two hours' journey S. of Jerusalem, is to be distinguished from Bethlehem in Zebulun ([Joshua 19:15](#)). It was but a short distance from Moab, which, in the days here referred to, was a fertile, highly cultivated country. Travellers still speak of it as a land of streams. Nothing short of the compulsion of famine could have induced a Hebrew to migrate into this foreign country where he would have no right of citizenship, this unclean land where Jehovah could not be worshipped.

2. The name **Elimelech** means 'my God is King.' **Naomi**, or, as it ought to be written, 'Noomi,' means 'pleasant.' The two sons, **Mahlon** ('sickly') and **Chilion** ('wasting away'), evidently owe their names to the fate which overtook them. It is not quite certain how we should understand the names of their wives. **Orpah** was taken by some of the Jewish commentators as signifying 'the back of the neck,' and explained by her having turned her back on Naomi. Ruth may be 'friend' or 'refreshment': the Talmud takes the latter view, 'because David sprang from her, who refreshed the Holy One with songs and praises.' **Ephrathah** is another name for Bethlehem, or perhaps the name of the district of Bethlehem” (Dummelow’s Commentary).

3And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons.

“Beth-lehem-judah—so called to distinguish it from a town of the same name in Zebulun. The family, compelled to emigrate to Moab through pressure of a famine, settled for several years in that country. After the death of their father, the two sons married Moabite women. This was a violation of the Mosaic law (De 7:3; 23:3; Ezr 9:2; Ne 13:23); and Jewish writers say that the early deaths of both the young men were divine judgments inflicted on them for those unlawful connections” (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary).

4And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years.

“Ruth holds a special place in Judeo-Christian tradition. Not only does she have a scriptural book named after her, but she is also the great-grandmother of David (and thus recognized as an ancestor of Jesus). Her loyalty to her mother-in-law when both women were without the male protection required at that time has provided an example of courage and devotion over the centuries.” (Bible Lens research)

5And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband.

“Marriages of Israelites with women of Ammon or Moab are nowhere in the Law expressly forbidden, as were marriages with the women of Canaan [Deuteronomy 7:1-3](#). In the days of Nehemiah the special law [Deuteronomy 23:3-6](#) was interpreted as forbidding them, and as excluding the children of such marriages from the congregation of Israel [Nehemiah 13:1-3](#). Probably the marriages of Mahlon and Chilion would be justified by necessity, living as they were in a foreign land. Ruth was the wife of the older brother, Mahlon [Ruth 4:10](#)” (Barnes' Notes).

“And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them,... As well as their father, in the land of Moab, after they had lived with their wives in it about ten years; the Targum is, "because they transgressed the decree of the Word of the Lord, and joined in affinity with strange people, their days were cut off;" or shortened:

and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband; deprived both of her husband and her sons, which was a great affliction, aggravated by her being in a strange country; many are the afflictions of the righteous” (Gill’s Exposition).

8And Naomi said unto her two daughters in law, Go, return each to her mother’s house: the LORD deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me.

“**Return.**—Naomi’s love is all unselfish. The company of Ruth and Orpah would clearly have been a great solace to her, yet she will not sacrifice them to herself. They each had a mother and a home; the latter, Naomi might fail to secure to them” (Ellicott’s Commentary).

“*Return each to her mother’s house* — She desires them to accompany her no farther, but to go back to their own home. And it seems it was usual in Moab, as well as in Israel, for widows to dwell with their parents. But she says, *mother’s*, rather than *father’s* house, because daughters used to converse more frequently with their mothers, and to dwell in the same apartments with them, which then were distinct from those parts of the house where the men dwelt. *The dead* — With my sons, your husbands, while they lived” (Benson Commentary).

“The young widow would naturally return to her mother's house, for she would live in the women's part of the house or tent ([Genesis 24:28](#), [Genesis 24:67](#); [Judges 4:17](#); [Song of Solomon 3:4](#))” (Dummelow’s).

16And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:

“**Intreat me not.**—Ruth’s nobleness is proof against all. The intensity of her feeling comes out all the more strongly now that she pleads alone: “I will undertake with thee the toilsome journey, I will lodge with thee however hardly, I will venture among a strange people, and will worship a new god” (Ellicott’s Commentary).

“*Entreat me not to leave thee* — For all thy entreaties cannot shake that resolution which thy instructions, formerly given, have wrought in me. *Whither thou goest, I will go* — Though to a country I never saw, which I have been taught to despise, and far distant from my own country. *Where thou lodgest, I will lodge* — Though it

be in a cottage; nay, though it be no better a lodging than Jacob had when he put the stones for his pillow. *Thy people shall be my people* — For, judging from what I have seen in thee, I conclude they must be a wise and understanding people, and I shall think myself happy if I may be reckoned one of them, may be associated with them, and conformed to them. *And thy God shall be my God* — Farewell to Chemosh and all the gods of Moab, which are vanities and lies. I will adore the God of Israel, the only living and true God; will trust in him alone, will love and serve him alone, and in every thing be commanded and ruled by him” (Benson Commentary).

“According to ancient ideas a god and his people were inseparable: if Ruth determined to go over to Naomi's fatherland and race she necessarily accepted their deity: if David was driven out of Israel he was thereby bidden, 'Go, serve other gods' ([1 Samuel 26:19](#)). Moreover, it was an even more cherished privilege then than now to be interred with one's relatives: the phrase for a desirable kind of burial was to be gathered to one's fathers.' In [Ezekiel 32:17-32](#) it is implied that the various nations inhabit separate localities in the invisible world. Ruth cleaves to her mother-in-law as Elisha to Elijah ([2 Kings 2:2-6](#))” (Dummelow's).

22 So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Beth-lehem in the beginning of barley harvest.

“Ruth's insistence on staying with Naomi meant committing to a new nation, a new God, and a new religion. Not unlike Samaritans in the time of Jesus, Moabites were generally viewed as enemies of Israel (see Numbers, chaps. 22–24) and banned from “the congregation of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 23:3). “ (Bible Lens)

“**Barley-harvest.**—God had restored plenty to His people, and the wayfarers thus arrive to witness and receive their share of the blessing. The barley harvest was the earliest ([Exodus 9:31-32](#)), and would ordinarily fall about the end of April” (Ellicott's Commentary).

“and Ruth the Moabitess her daughter in law with her, which returned out of the country of Moab; to Bethlehem, the birth place of the Messiah, and who was to spring from her a Gentile; and which, that it might be the more carefully remarked, she is called a Moabitess, and said to return out of the country of Moab” (Gill's Exposition).

