

The Barley was Already Standing

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Ruth 1 & 2

Ruth opens with a woman who loses everything, and it takes her about 20 verses to get to a sentence I think some of you have said out loud, *"I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty."* Nobody in the story corrects her.

Verse 1 of Ruth tells us when this happened. *"In the days when the judges ruled."* This lets us know things are operating under the *"judges' playbook."* This playbook repeats itself over and over in Judges: the people abandon the LORD, God gives them over to an enemy, the people are oppressed, then they cry out for deliverance, God raises up a deliverer, there is peace. Then the deliverer dies and it starts again. And the book ends with the line that explains all of it: *"everyone did what was right in his own eyes."*

This is the spiritual climate that Ruth's story is set in. A nation going in circles. And in that world, in a town called Bethlehem (which means *house of bread*) – the bread ran out.

I. What Kind of World is Ruth Living In? (Ruth 1:1a)

- A. Ruth lives in the days when the *"judges ruled."*
- B. Famine in Israel is not about the weather / it is God's covenant discipline on the land.
 - 1. *God told Israel exactly how this would work before they ever crossed into the land. Obey, and the rain comes and the ground gives its fruit. Turn away from Me, and the sky turns to bronze and the ground to iron. God is staying true to His word. (Deut 28:23-24; Lev 26:19-20; 1 Kings 8:35-36)*
 - 2. *The text does not tell us whether Elimelech was right or wrong to flee Bethlehem. It only tells us he fled Bethlehem, he stayed in Moab, and he died in Moab. This story is not about him, it is about what God does next.*

II. What Does Grief Cost These Three Women? (1:1b-5)

- A. In reading **1:1b-5**, we collapse more than 10 years into a few sentences and arrive with Naomi widowed and without her two sons.
- B. Widowhood in ancient times:
 - 1. **Verse 5**, *"without her two sons and her husband."* She is unattached, in a foreign country, with no means of income, no legal voice, and no address.
- C. In his book, *A Grief Observed*, C.S. Lewis wrote, *"No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid."* People who face tragedy feel both grief and fear.
 - 1. Fear comes from wondering what the loss means for their future.
 - 2. Grief from the sense of loss of the past joys and pleasures.

III. Why Does Naomi Go Back? (Ruth 1:6-15)

- A. Simply, she heard there was food. More importantly, the Lord visited his people. (**1:6-7**)
- B. Naomi's prayer for Ruth and Orpah (**1:8-9**):
 - 1. May the LORD (Yahweh) deal kindly with you.
 - 2. May the LORD (Yahweh) grant that you find rest, each in the house of her husband.
 - a) Rest or resting place; dwelling place of provision and protection
- C. The decisions of Ruth and Orpah:
 - 1. Naomi's insistence (**1:10-14a**)
 - 2. Orpah kissed Naomi (**1:14b, 15**). This was a goodbye kiss.
 - 3. Ruth *"clung to her."* (**1:14c**) (to hold firm, not let go, cleave, grip tightly) (**Deuteronomy 10:20**, *"You shall fear the Lord your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him..."*)

IV. What Does Ruth Say? (Ruth 1:16-18)

- A. Her Six Statements: Go, Lodge, People, God, Death, Buried.
 - 1. A person's grave was their last act of belonging. Ruth gave up her Moabite belonging.
- B. Her Oath (17b) – a Moabite woman calls down a curse on herself by Yahweh (personal name).
- C. The text tells us Ruth *"clung"* and Orpah *"returned."* (Both received the same counsel, same circumstances, same mother-in-law: two decisions). What we conclude from Scripture is that the difference was not the *"character of Ruth,"* it was in the God who grants what He requires.

- D. The Open Problem (**Deut 23:3**, “*No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the Lord.*”)
1. A Moabite woman, with no right to the covenant and no reason left to hope, swore by the name of Israel’s God and He kept her!

V. **Was Naomi Wrong about God? (Ruth 1:19-22)**

- A. After Ruth’s speech, listen to Naomi when they enter Bethlehem. Listen for how many people She says came back with her (**Ruth 1:19-22, in full**) She means what she says...
- B. She describes her life as one who went from “*pleasantness*” to “*bitterness*.” (Naomi vs. Mara) (**1:20**). She calls God, *the Almighty, Shaddai*. She is not confused about Who is in power.
- C. No one corrects her theology. “*Scripture lets a grieving woman declare a hard but true thing about God’s hand in her life and does not scold her for it.*” God is not absent, He has not lost control, the deaths are not random. Her doctrine was correct, but her arithmetic was wrong.
- D. **See 1:21**, “*brought me back empty.*” Now **1:22**. There are no corrections to Naomi’s declaration. Naomi says she came back empty; but, Ruth is standing with her.
- E. Notice the last phrase of chapter 1, “*And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.*”
1. Grief tells you what you lost. Fear tells you what is coming. Neither fear, nor grief is a reliable witness to what God is doing! ***What Naomi and Ruth need, God, in His providential way, has already prepared.***
2. We must cling to God’s sovereignty in even the most difficult of circumstances.

VI. **How Does God Feed A Person Who Has Nothing (Ruth 2:1-11)**

- A. God’s provision had a name before anyone saw him (**Ruth 2:1**).
- B. Ruth harvests what God had assigned to the poor (**Ruth 2:2**)
- C. Ruth happens to “chance chanced” on the field that matters (**Ruth 2:3**, *So she set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers, and she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech.*) (This was not luck, chance, or destiny. It was God in charge. And, she still had to get up early and walk out and glean in the heat until evening.)
- D. Boaz does more for Ruth than the law requires (**Ruth 2:4-9**) (See **Leviticus 19:9-10**)
- E. Boaz acknowledges Ruth’s sacrificial service to Naomi before she said a word (**Ruth 2:10-11**)
1. Boaz knows what she gave up. Listen to his prayer for Ruth (**Ruth 2:12**).

VII. **What Has Been True the Whole Time?**

- A. Boaz prays that God would cover her with His wings **Ruth 2:12**, *The Lord repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!*” (Study for later: **Deut 32:11**; **Psalm 17:8**; **Psalm 36:7**; **Psalm 91:4**; **Matt 23:37**)
- B. Ruth eats until she is full and carries more than a widow could earn (**2:14-18**)
- C. Naomi hears one name that changes everything (**2:19-20a**)
1. **Ruth 2:20**, *And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, “May he be blessed by the Lord, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!”* Naomi also said to her, “*The man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers.*”
2. Redeemer, *go’el*, names the job of the close relative or “kinsman.” (**Leviticus 25:25, 47-49**)
3. Three qualifications: near of kin, able to pay, and willing to act. Naomi was telling Ruth such a man exists!
- D. She does not say God has become kind. She says His kindness never left. Nothing about her losses changed — she just found out what had been true the whole time.

Our Prayer for Today:

Lord Jesus, You are the God who goes ahead of us before we can see You. When we come to our emptiness as Naomi did, we remember what You have done. You provided for Naomi. You have provided for us. You gave us a Savior, who would give His life as a ransom for our sins.

When Naomi walked into Bethlehem, she said she came back empty. But the barley was already standing in the field. Forgive us for trusting in our own math and failing to trust Your character. We do not worship You because we see the harvest. We worship you because you have already planted the harvest.

Amen.