

Pastor Jim Jackson, 1/8/17
Ruth—Life, Loss, Love and Legacy, pt. 1
Ruth 1:1-5

The setting—Israel is in a DROUGHT

The book of Ruth is a masterpiece of narrative storytelling, unparalleled in ancient literature for its warm and compact yet descriptive way of communicating. The story is told from a woman's viewpoint—largely characterized by feminine feelings, values, and concerns of family, sisterhood, marriage, work, love, and romance. The background of the story of Ruth takes place c. 1200 BC during the time of the Judges after the nation of Israel had begun their conquest into the land of Canaan (modern-day Israel). During this time, there is a famine that forces many Israelites to move to survive.

The scenario—The family is DESPERATE

Because of the lack of grain, Elimilech ('my God is King'), his wife Naomi ('pleasant one'), and his two sons, Mahlon ('sickly') and Chilion ('wasting away') moved about 80 miles from Bethlehem ('house of bread') to a rural area of Moab across the Jordan river. As most famines don't last 10 years, Elimilech 'sojourned' then 'remained' then 'lived' in a foreign country, turning temporary into permanent. Moabites were pagan god worshippers and often enemies of Israel, yet Elimilech allowed his sons to marry Moabite women, endangering his family's own godly heritage (Ex. 34:15, 16; 1 Kings 11:1, 2). *Life problems should never alter lifestyle priorities.*

The sadness—Naomi is DEVASTATED

At some point after settling in Moab, Elimilech dies leaving his sons (probably in their late teens/early twenties) to care for their mother. Eventually, they marry Moabite women—Orpah and Ruth ('friend/companion'). After about 10 years, the sons die as well, leaving no children of their own and putting the three women in financial distress. With their deaths, Naomi has lost her whole family and means of support as an older widow. Despite the emotional pain of losing loved ones and fear of the future, believers look to God for help and hope in the darkness of despair (Ps. 9:9; 30:5; 34:18; 116:1, 2). Though Naomi didn't do anything to bring about her circumstances, she had a choice in how to respond. The choices of others and events of life that are out of a person's control are moments designed to strengthen faith not destroy it (Ps. 31:23, 24; Prov. 3:5, 6; Is. 7:9). *Loss in life should not bring about loss in faith!*