

## **“A Stressful Beginning”**

*October 11, 2015*

Ruth 1:1-5

### **I. Introduction**

The times we live in are perilous times—in the US, in Australia, in the world. Living as a Christian obeying God’s laws is not easy and, in fact, seems to be getting more and more difficult every day. The violence and sinfulness and moral decay around us continues to grow and, rather than turning to God, people—even churches—are turning from God. Paul wrote about such times, [turn to Romans 1:18-32](#). This was a rather long section, but it didn’t seem right this morning to read just part of it. It is a catalog of moral decay in Paul’s day, but it could also be a catalog of the moral decay in the world day. If things don’t change, many feel that a time of persecution is coming for Christians—even in the US. But that doesn’t mean that we just give up and join in with the world. Rather, this is a time when our faith needs to grow—[turn to James 1:2-4](#). We need to trust verses like [Proverbs 3:5-6](#) which say, **“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”**

The Book of Ruth is also about those living in perilous times. It a true historical account of a young foreign girl who came out of paganism and idolatry in the land of Moab. It is a well written and very organized love story about everyday kind of people. In one way it is the story of two women. It relates how one of them, Naomi, underwent much hardship, but eventually won through to peace and security. It tells how the other, Ruth, attached herself firmly to her mother-in-law and to her mother-in-law’s God and how she received blessings from God. But most of all, this book is a book about God Himself. It deals with unimportant people and seemingly unimportant matters. But it deals with them in such a way as to show that God is active in the affairs of all men. He works His purpose out and blesses those that trust in Him—whether they are the movers and shakers of the world or the seemingly small people of the world.

Ruth also is about redemption—redemption that is possible because of a kinsman redeemer. This is an example of **THE** Kinsman-Redeemer who would come to redeem each one of us—Jesus Christ. Finally, Ruth also gives a genealogy that will lead to the Lord Jesus Christ, and it explains His coming from the line of David. Just a quick note, Ruth is one of the 5 women in Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus; the others are Tamar, Rahab, Bathsheba, and Mary ([Matthew 1:3, 5-6, 16](#)).

In today's Scripture, we see a stressful beginning to a story with a happy ending. If you have never done so, why not take time this week to read through this short 4-chapter book from beginning to end.

## II. A Stressful Beginning

**A. The Time** The opening words give the date or time of the story: “**when the judges ruled.**” The Book of Judges is the story of Israel at one of its lowest points in history. Life wasn't easy in those days of the judges—men like Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson & Delilah. It was a time of rampant sin; there was division, cruelty, civil war, turning from God, and national disgrace. **Judges 17:6** summed it up this way, “**In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.**” As we saw in Romans 1, things haven't changed, today we call such an attitude “situational ethics.”

It was during this time of compromise, conflict, and corruption that this story takes place. The Book of Ruth is a glimmer of light in the midst of darkness. It is a reminder that God is always in control and He is always able to work, as Romans 8:28 says, “**For the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.**” Just as He watched over Naomi and Ruth and Boaz, God watches over and cares for all people who obey Him and show love one for another—common or otherwise.

**B. The Place** There's “**the time**” and then there's “**the place.**” The writer records the initial place as Bethlehem in Judah to distinguish it from other Bethlehems in Israel. It's ironic that there should be a famine in Bethlehem—Bethlehem means “*House of Bread.*” The story of Ruth begins and ends here in Bethlehem with a time in the middle in Moab. This is the same Bethlehem that would be the home of David and the place where Jesus would be born.

During the time “**when the judges ruled,**” the Book of Judges records that the people would turn from the true God to idolatry and moral corruption. Because of His love for His children, God would discipline them. The people would cry to God for help and God would raise up a judge to deliver them. Things would go well until that judge died and then “**everyone did as he saw fit**” and the cycle would begin again.

In the Old Testament, a famine was often a sign of God's discipline because His people had sinned against Him. So, although no famine is recorded in the Book of Judges, God may have been using this famine as discipline to get His people to come back to Him. As always, the godly had to suffer because of the ungodly, even in Bethlehem.

**C. The Major Decision** Then we see a major decision, “**A man from Bethlehem, i.e. the “City of Bread,” in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab.**”

Flee the famine to Moab. Like his ancestor Abraham, instead of waiting for God to tell him what to do, Elimelech decided to flee from trouble. Moab didn't seem to be experiencing a famine, so to Moab they went. By going 50 miles east to the neighboring land of Moab, Elimelech and his family left God's land and God's people for the land and people of the enemy.

[Genesis 19:30-38](#) tells us that the Moabites were descendants of Lot from his sinful union with his older daughter following the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the death of Lot's wife. The Moabites were enemies of the Jews—this is seen in the way they treated Israel during their wandering from Egypt to Canaan—[turn to Deuteronomy 23:3-6](#). Later, during the time of the judges, [Judges 3:12-14](#) records that Moab invaded Israel and ruled over the people for 18 years. It was later, during a time of relative peace, that Elimelech decided to flee to Moab.

**D. The Characters** [Verse 2](#) gives the names of those who fled to Moab, “**The man's name was Elimelech, his wife's name Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion.**” The name of the father is Elimelech; his name means “*my God is King.*” But the Lord was not king in Elimelech's life—he had left God completely out of his decisions. The name of his wife was Naomi which means “*pleasant.*” Elimelech and Naomi had two sons Mahlon and Kilion. Mahlon means “*sick or unhealthy;*” Kilion means “*pinning or frail person.*” Perhaps the boys had been renamed after their poor physical conditions appeared. Then we see the results...

**E. The Results** using faulty reasoning, Elimelech took his family to Moab where he soon died. Because of Elimelech's bad decision, another bad decision occurred—his two sons married women from Moab. From [Ruth 4:10](#) we see that Mahlon married Ruth whose name means “*friendship*” and Kilion married Orpah which may mean “*gazelle.*” To be fair, marriages to the indigenous people of the Promised Land were forbidden by God—[turn to Deuteronomy 7:1-4](#). But those from Moab aren't included—but as we read earlier in [Deuteronomy 23:1-3](#), there were restrictions.

The family had planned on staying in Moab only for a while, but they ended up staying there for 10 years. By the end of those 10 years both Mahlon and Kilion died. All that remained were 3 lonely widows and three Jewish graves in a heathen land. Everything else was gone. Naomi was all alone without her sons and her husband.

### III. Conclusion

Today, just like in Ruth's day, we are experiencing national and international troubles; there is a definite lack of morality, and there are difficulties of every kind, yet God's Word says He loves the world—[2 Peter 3:9](#) says, “**The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.**” In spite of

all the alarming headlines in the news and dangers on the streets, God is still here. If Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior, no matter how tough the times may be [1 Peter 5:7](#) says to “**Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.**” You are part of a beautiful love story.

When trouble comes into our lives, we can do one of three things: 1) we can stoically endure them; 2) we can try to escape them; 3) we can grow through them. If we merely endure our trials, then those trials or disasters become our masters. With such an attitude, one has a tendency to become hard and bitter. Or, like Elimelech, we may try to escape our trials. If we do, we may miss the purpose God wants to accomplish in our lives. In [Jeremiah 29:11](#) God said, “**For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.**” The last choice is that we can grow through our troubles. [Turn to 1 Peter 1:3-7](#). The only way a weightlifter gets stronger is by lifting heavier and heavier weights. The only way a tennis player gets better is by playing harder and harder opponents. The only way a Christian’s faith and love and perseverance can grow is through harder and harder trials.

Sometimes trials come because God is judging or chastening some open or hidden sin. If this is the reason for trouble, then we need to confess our sin—[1 John 1:9](#) says that “**If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.**” Sometimes disasters come and the suffering that takes place is not the result of God punishing sin in the life of the believer. Sometimes it comes in order that God may grow the believer and bring glory to Himself through the believer’s life. When troubles come, we need to have the same attitude of Jesus Christ—[turn to Philippians 2:5-11](#). If you have this attitude in the midst of troubles, when you stand before God you will hear the words from [Matthew 25:21](#), “**Well done, good and faithful servant.**”