
THEME:
BITTERNESS
BLAMING GOD FOR
OUR TRIALS

RUTH 1:19-22

Adeoye, Emmanuel (Evangelist)

Ruth 1:19-21

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?"

²⁰ BUT SHE SAID TO THEM, "DO NOT CALL ME NAOMI;* CALL ME MARA,* FOR THE ALMIGHTY HAS DEALT VERY BITTERLY WITH ME. ²¹ 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?"

The two widows probably visited the three graves of their loved ones for the last time before leaving Moab. Then they committed themselves to the Lord and set out to begin a new life. It would be interesting to know what Naomi and Ruth talked about as they journeyed from Moab to Bethlehem. Did Naomi give her daughter-in-law some basic instruction in the Law of Moses? Did Ruth ask questions about the Jewish faith, the Jewish people, and her new home in Bethlehem? We wonder what kind of answers Naomi would have given since she was a bitter woman with a faltering faith in the God of Israel.

Naomi had been away from home for ten years, and the women of the town were shocked when they saw her. (In v. 19, the pronoun of "they said" is feminine.) Their question "Is this Naomi?" suggests both surprise and bewilderment. The name Naomi means "pleasant," but she was not living up to her name. She was not the Naomi whom they had known a decade before. Her ten difficult years in Moab, and the sorrows they had brought, had taken their toll on Naomi's appearance and personality. Instead of making her better, the trials of life had made her bitter, which is the meaning of the word *mara*.

To begin with, she accused the Lord of dealing very bitterly with her (**Ruth 1:20**). She had left Bethlehem with a husband and two sons and had come home without them. She had gone to Moab possessing the necessities of life, but now she had returned home having nothing. She was a woman with empty hands, an empty home, and an empty heart. Because she didn't surrender to the Lord and accept His loving chastening, she did not experience "the peaceful fruit of righteousness" (**Heb. 12:11**).

Not only had the Lord dealt bitterly with her, but He had also testified against her in these afflictions (Ruth 1:21). Is this Naomi's confession of sin, her admission that she and her family had sinned in going to Moab? Is she hinting that they deserved all that they had suffered? Twice Naomi called God "the Almighty," which is the Hebrew name El Shaddai, "the All-powerful One" (vv. 20-21). It's one thing to *know* God's name and quite something else to *trust* that name and allow God to work in the difficult situations of life. "And those who know Your name will put their trust in You; for You, Lord, have not forsaken those who seek You" (Ps 9:10, NKJV). Naomi knew the name but did not exercise the faith.

But was Naomi really that poor and empty? Or was she simply exaggerating her situation because she was weary of body and bitter of soul? Just think of the resources she had that should have encouraged her.

For one thing, she had *life*; and this in itself is a precious gift from God—a gift we too often take for granted. Naomi left three graves back in Moab, but God in His goodness had kept her alive and brought her back to Bethlehem. "

Fear not that your life shall come to an end," said John Henry Newman, "but rather that it shall never have a beginning." Naomi thought that life had ended for her, but her trials were really a new beginning. Naomi's faith and hope were about to die, but God had other plans for her! Naomi not only had life, but she also had *opportunity*. She was surrounded by friends, all of whom wanted the very best for her. At first, her sorrow and bitterness isolated her from the community, but gradually that changed. Instead of sitting looking gloomily at a wall, she finally decided to look out the window; and then she got up and opened the door! When the night is the darkest, if we look up, we can still see the stars.

One of Naomi's richest resources was *her daughter-in-law Ruth*. In fact, it is Ruth whom God used and blessed throughout the rest of this book; for Ruth was a woman who trusted God and was totally committed to Him. Naomi soon learned that God's hand of blessing was on this young woman and that He would accomplish great things through her obedience.

But most of all, Naomi still had *Jehovah, the God of Israel*. The Lord is mentioned about twenty-five times in this brief book, for He is the Chief Actor in this drama whether Naomi realized it or not. "I firmly believe in Divine Providence," said President Woodrow Wilson. "

John Wesley said, "Best of all, God is with us!" God is not only *with* us, but He is also *for* us; and "if God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom 8:31, KJV)

It was barley harvest when the two widows arrived in Bethlehem, a time when the community expressed joy and praise to God for His goodness. It was spring, a time of new life and new beginning. Alexander Whyte often told his Edinburgh congregation that the victorious Christian life is "a series of new beginnings," and he was right. Naomi was about to make a new beginning; for with God, it's never too late to start over again.

Are you trusting God for *your* new beginning? After all, with God at your side, your resources are far greater than your burdens. Stop staring at the wall and, by faith, get up and open the door to a brand-new tomorrow.

- **LESSONS TO TAKE HOME**

- 1 TRIALS HAS NO TIME LIMIT (DON'T LIVE IN THE PAST) - ***ECC 7:10, PHIL: 3:13-14***
- 2 TRIAL MAKES US SYMPATHETIC TOWARD OTHERS
- 3 TRIAL HUMBLER US
- 4 TRIALS PURIFY US
- 5 TRIALS TEACHES US TO PRAY

Conclusion