

Series: **Ruth**
Today's Title: "***When Disaster Strikes***"
January 21, 2024 – *Ruth 1*

Objective: To help people be confident in God through difficulty and to remain faithful during difficult times.

Plant Pastor Search Update – Andrew Wade – video.

Opening prayer

BBOV chapel – when I started to speak to the kids – preschool kids – 1 little boy in the front just blurted out, "*Why are you talking?*"

Turn to the O.T. book of **Ruth** – p. 222

Today I'm starting a 4-sermon series on the book of Ruth. Ruth is 1 of 2 books in the Bible named after a woman, the other book is the book of **Esther**.

In your Bible, the book of **Judges** is right before **Ruth**.

The book of **Judges** covers a period of about 400 years of Israel's history, before Israel moved to a monarchy – to having a king.

Before there was a king – there were judges who would rule and govern various regions of Israel.

Judges was not a good time for the nation of Israel.

The last verse in the book of Judges...

Judges 21:25

"In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

Relativism is nothing new.

It's somewhere during the time of the judges that the events of **Ruth** occur.

It's likely these events occurred very early in the time of the Judges, since one of the main characters we'll be introduced to in **chapter 2** is a man named Boaz, whose mother was Rahab.

Rahab the prostitute mentioned in **Joshua 2** (Matthew 1:5).

The events likely took place early in the period of the Judges, but Ruth was written during or after the time of King David (1,000 B.C.) – given the closing of the book that mentions David.

The author is unknown, but many believe it was written by Solomon.

Ruth is a story – a true story – about difficulty, death, disaster, loyalty, commitment, and God's provision.

The story opens with the author giving some context, and then we see extreme difficulty followed by disaster.

Read vs. 1-5

Who do you trust when disaster strikes? vs. 1-5

“In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land...”

There is irony here in **vs. 1** – Bethlehem means *‘house of bread’* – but there is no bread to be found.

The people in this story / this family are named for us. In ancient times names were important.

Names were not random – or given because of popularity.

Names told you something about the person.

Parents would name their children in hope of what their child would become.

Or they named their children according to something inherent about them.

Elimelech = My God is King

Naomi = Pleasant or delightful

Mahlon = weak or sick

Chilion = tired or dying

Orpah = fawn or gazelle

Ruth = friendship

Moab is also mentioned in **vs. 1**.

Moab was a nation on the eastern side of the Dead Sea.

Today this is the country of Jordan.

We're told the family left Bethlehem – left Judah – to

“...sojourn in the country of Moab.”

This is not an unimportant detail.

Leaving Israel – leaving the Promised Land – revealed a lack of faith in God's provision.

Moab was not a place or a people of blessing.

It was the opposite – a place and people who were cursed and under God's judgment.

The reasons are (1) due to their origin – and (2) their treatment of Israel during the wilderness years.

1. Their Origin

Moab was born out of incest between Lot and his daughters. You can read the account in **Genesis 19**.

Genesis 19:36-38

“Thus both the daughters of Lot became pregnant by their father. The firstborn bore a son and called his name Moab. He is the father of the Moabites to this day. The younger also bore a son and called his name Ben-ammi. He is the father of the Ammonites to this day.”

The nation was literally birthed through one of the most demented and evil sexual sins.

But beyond their evil origin, their posture against Israel was the larger problem for the nation of Moab.

2. Their treatment of Israel

Judges 11:17-18; 2 Kings 1:1; Numbers 22

There were numerous times that Moab worked against Israel – opposing them – fighting against them – refusing to help them.

It is for these reasons that Moab was cursed by God. God had forbidden them from ever entering into fellowship with the Jewish people.

Deuteronomy 23:3

“No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the LORD.”

God commanded His people never to marry a Moabite.

1 Kings 11:1-2

Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the people of Israel, “You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods.”

Moabites also worshiped a false god – Chemosh. Part of the worship of Chemosh involved child sacrifice.

Moab was in a place of judgment for their actions against Israel.

Psalm 60:8

“Moab is My washbasin...”

When Elimelech led his family from Israel – to live in Moab – this was not a move God would bless.

They were in a crisis situation.

Elimelech did what he thought was right in his own eyes.

We can understand why Elimelech moved his family to Moab.

They’re in a desperate situation – *and when you’re desperate, you tend to make bad decisions.*

One of the bad decisions we often make is choosing economic blessing or security – over spiritual protection or spiritual faithfulness.

We are a very materialistic society, and we often think more money – financial advancement – is always the best option.

Even if it means moving from a solid support group / support system / a good church (spiritual family) to be paid more money.

Famine is not something we can relate to – as we have grocery stores filled with any kind of food we can imagine.

But a famine in ancient times was a serious, deadly reality.

Moab must have had some sort of promise or hope of food.

The famine must not have been as severe in Moab. We can only assume this is why Elimelech led his family to this God-cursed, evil nation.

When disaster strikes, do you remain faithful to God – or do you flee to ‘Moab’?

Do you value your own judgment – your own analysis – over God’s truth and will for your life?

You’re in love – you’re planning to marry this special person – so it’s OK to have sex even though you’re not

married. After all, you love each other and plan on getting married!!

You've chosen Moab over Israel.

You're struggling financially – and there's something you've been wanting to buy – and it's on a great sale – but to buy it you'll have to skip or decrease your giving to the Lord.

You've chosen Moab over Israel.

You've met this special person – but they're not a Christian.

You know the Bible teaches against dating or marrying an unbeliever.

2 Corinthians 6:14

“Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.”

NLT – “Don't team up with those who are unbelievers.”

But you're so in love!

You justify – you rationalize – and decide to continue dating anyhow – or you eventually get married – even though God's Word is clear on this issue.

You've chosen Moab over Israel.

Well, in Moab – life does not get better.

Disaster strikes.

First, Elimelech dies.

Then, Naomi's sons – Mahlon and Chilion die.

The only ones left are Naomi – and her 2 daughters-in-law: Orpah and Ruth – both are Moabite women.

When we choose to follow our own wisdom – instead of God’s wisdom – instead of God’s clear commands or principles – we will usually encounter difficulty – and maybe even disaster.

Repent from wrong choices. vs. 6-14

vs. 5 ends and we have a very bleak, dark picture.

“...so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.”

In the ancient world, unmarried or widowed women – who were without extended family, did not have any ongoing means of provision or protection.

This is where Naomi makes a decision – a very brave decision.

She decides to go back to Bethlehem – back to Israel.

Read vs. 6-14

Naomi’s decision to leave Moab and return to Israel was not an easy one.

There were so many questions.

- How would she make ends meet?
- How would the town of Bethlehem treat her?
- Would they receive her back – after she left to live in Moab?

So many unknowns.

But she knew what the right thing was.

The right decision was to return to Israel.
But to go to Israel, she would have to turn her back to Moab – turn her back to her Moabite friends – to everything of last 10 years.

This was true for Naomi – and it's true for us.

When we realize we've gone the wrong way – we're hanging out with the wrong people – we're watching the wrong things – doing things we shouldn't do.

We need to turn our back and walk away.

That's what repent means: To turn the other way.

- Are you in a place you shouldn't be?
- Are you with people you shouldn't be with?
- Are you doing things you shouldn't be doing?

Then turn your back to it all – and walk back to the Lord!!!

It's not easy – it's a tough decision because there are people involved – but it's the right decision!!!

- This decision will change Naomi's legacy.
- It will change the life of Ruth – putting her into the family line of Jesus.
- Her decision will turn out to be one of the great expressions of God's grace – of His redemption from judgment.

vs. 6 - Her motive for returning – beyond the disaster she had experienced in Moab - is the famine in Bethlehem – in Israel is over. God's blessing had returned to the land.

Naomi sets out on her journey – “...with her two daughters-in-law”.

But along the way, Naomi realizes she can't be responsible for these 2 women.

It will be hard enough to meet her own needs – let alone all 3 of them.

She tells them to go back to their family – and blesses them.

It's an emotional discussion.

At first, both Orpah and Ruth insist on staying with her – to return to “your people” (vs. 10).

Naomi's response is a logical one.

She helps them see that staying with her so they can remain part of her family is not practical – it doesn't make sense.

Orpah leaves and returns to her own mother.

“...but Ruth clung to her.”

“bitter” is how Naomi describes what she's feeling.

Bitter.

This is so often the case – what so many people think and feel when disaster strikes in their life.

Bitter.

Later, when she arrives in Bethlehem – she will tell people she has a new name – “Mara” – which means bitter. She says God has been “bitter” toward her.

She blames God for all her problems – and the disaster that has come upon her.

In the sovereignty of God, there is some truth to her statement, but she dismisses any responsibility for what has happened.

They had embraced a nation and people who had been cursed by God and was under God’s judgment, and they left the land of God’s blessing.

It’s quite common for people who experience suffering and loss to blame God – to become “bitter” toward God – toward others – toward life!

We forget – or don’t fully understand – how God will always use evil and suffering for His good purposes.

He allows evil – but He is not the cause or author of evil. Naomi doesn’t realize that through the disaster she has endured, God is bringing about a great blessing to her – a blessing to Israel – to the entire world – which even extends to us here today!!

Ruth’s loyalty and her faith in God. *vs. 15-18*

Here we have one of the great statements of faith in the Bible.

What Ruth says – is often repeated in weddings today because it’s such a great statement of loyalty and faith.

Read vs. 15-18

Ruth does not follow Orpah – but remains steadfast in her loyalty to Naomi.

But's its more than loyalty to Naomi.

It's a commitment to Naomi's God.

Ruth is turning her back on Chemosh – the false god she grew up worshiping.

She's turning her back on her family – her friends – her people.

She's repenting.

She realizes that her god – her family – her friends – her people – are not good for her – not a good influence – and she grips tightly to Naomi.

vs. 16b-17 – “Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.”

Ruth is making a clean break – a complete separation from her false religion – and all her connections to her old way of life.

She is embracing not only Naomi, but more importantly Naomi's God – who is now her God (“your God my God”) – and she's embracing a new nation – the nation of God's blessing (“Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried.”).

Do you need to make a clean break?

Do you need to separate yourself from the idols in your life – from those in your life who pull you away from God?

Bitterness in the midst of blessing. vs. 19-22

Read vs. 19-22

When we consider the bitterness in Naomi's heart, it's difficult to blame her after all she's been through.

Expressing grief – anger – frustration about life is something we see in many places in the Bible.

We see it most often in the Psalms.

There is a whole category of Psalms which are 'Psalms of Lament'. They are the largest category of Psalms – about 1/3 of all the Psalms!!

One of the most well-known is:

Psalm 22:1

"My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?"

This was a psalm that David wrote – about his struggles – and it was a Messianic Psalm that Jesus quoted as He hung on the cross.

So, there is an appropriate way to express our emotions to God.

The difference between Naomi and the Lament Psalms – is the Psalms cry out to God – but don't blame Him –

and they end in a statement of praise or confidence in God and His deliverance – His wisdom – His goodness.

When Disaster Strikes...

Your response... is your responsibility.

But this chapter ends with this sentence:

“And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.”

For reasons we’ll get into next week – this was perfect timing for Naomi and Ruth – who had no means of provision when they arrived.

In the “barley harvest” we will see God’s sovereignty, His blessing – His kindness, His provision, and His grace.

Always know – in the worst of times – **When Disaster Strikes** – God is still working – He is still sovereign – He is still kind and gracious.

Apply it...

Don’t choose Moab.

When disaster strikes – remain faithful to God and His commands.

Don’t usurp His wisdom and truth for what you think is better.

Turn from what is wrong and walk back to God.

Repentance is about doing a 180.

Turning around – going the opposite direction you have been going.

This requires turning your back – leaving the things you have been doing or the people you’ve been with. This is not easy – they may not understand. But you must make a clean break from the things and the people who are pulling you away from God.

Open your heart to God in prayer.

Express your thoughts – feelings – emotions to God, but don’t blame Him for the difficulty or disaster in your life.

He uses evil for good.

He uses pain for comfort.

He uses trouble for strength.

He uses disaster for blessing!

Close in prayer