

# ***Even When... God is Still at Work!***

## **Introduction**

### **Ruth 1:1–5 (NLT)**

<sup>1</sup> In the days when the judges ruled in Israel, a severe famine came upon the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah left his home and went to live in the country of Moab, taking his wife and two sons with him. <sup>2</sup> The man's name was Elimelech, and his wife was Naomi. Their two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in the land of Judah. And when they reached Moab, they settled there. <sup>3</sup> Then Elimelech died, and Naomi was left with her two sons. <sup>4</sup> The two sons married Moabite women. One married a woman named Orpah, and the other a woman named Ruth. But about ten years later, <sup>5</sup> both Mahlon and Kilion died. This left Naomi alone, without her two sons or her husband.

The story of Ruth shines like a sparkling diamond against the dark backdrop of the book of Judges, which take place at the same time. This beautiful short story contains the human elements of anxiety, fear, love, and commitment. It begins with despair and ends with delight.

My goal today is to cement one main truth into our hearts – that no matter what is happening in our lives, **God is still at work!** My title is, “Even When... God is Still at Work!” We’re going to look at four “even when” situations presented in the book of Ruth and see how God was still at work in each situation.

## **1. Even When the World Around Us is Crumbling... God is Still at Work!**

### **A. Their Crumbling World**

The history of the book of Judges was between 1200 B.C. and 1020 B.C. It was a time of tribalism, chaos, violence, unchecked lawlessness, and tribal civil war. Judges ends that “every man did what was right in their own eyes.” “They did as they saw fit.” The culture was filled with decay and corruption.

When a culture rejects God's truth, the Bible, they can no longer determine right from wrong from an objective source, making mob rule the ultimate determiner of the direction of their society.

It's interesting that Bethlehem, which means house of bread, was breadless because of a famine in the land. We're not told if the famine was a direct consequence of spiritual famine, but the Bible certainly warn us of the consequences of our rebellion. (Deut. 11, 28)

It's important to know that Moab was an enemy of Israel. It's not going too far to say it's a bit like Israel and the Palestinians today. The Moabites were descendants of Lot, Abraham's nephew. They refused to help Israel during their desert wanderings and even had a negative influence of sexual immorality and pagan worship. Elimelech planted his family in the heart of darkness.

- B. Was God still at work in this bleak situation? YES!

What about today... is God still at work?

**Psalm 23:4** (NLT) Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me.

**Psalm 46:1–2** (NIV84) <sup>1</sup> God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. <sup>2</sup> Therefore we will not fear, [even] though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,

## 2. **Even When We Face Overwhelming Trials... God is Still at Work!**

- A. Their Overwhelming Trials

Things go from bad to worse. During their stay in Moab, Naomi's husband Elimelech died and then about ten years later, both Mahlon (sickly) and Kilion (pinea) also die. Naomi, Orpah and Ruth are now widows. Widows in the ancient world had no social status and no economic means to survive. There was no Social Security system, and they had no male protector or provider. This would especially be true for Naomi, since she was an Israelite living in a foreign country.

1. Let's talk about the grief of losing a loved one.

Naomi, which means pleasant, lovely, or delightful, went from beautiful to bitter. (Later in the story when she goes back to Bethlehem, her old friends hardly recognize her.)

Naomi openly expresses her grief. Sometimes we as Christians think that we need to cover up all our pain and grieving. But our testimony is more authentic to our friends if we admit our pain and stretching through trials, yet God wins. If we project an untested faith, as though we are immune to suffering, the world won't listen to us. God isn't immune to the pain and suffering of our world. Why should we be.

2. We experience grief, but we have the hope of Christ!  
Our experience with Amber, the Lord was present!

## B. Even When We Face Overwhelming Trials... God is Still at Work!

### 1. Naomi's Character Shines Through

Think about Naomi for a moment. She goes to Moab with her husband and sons, leaving her friends and her country behind. We don't really know from the book whether she wanted to go or not, but we do know that she cultivated her character while she was there.

- She continued to walk with God, even when her two sons married Moabites.
- Naomi mentions the Lord frequently. "The lord brought harvest to her homeland." "May the Lord show kindness" to her daughters in law.
- She continued worshiping the true God even when the entire culture around her were bowing to false gods.

### 2. Naomi's Impact on Ruth (the story...)

**Ruth 1:16 (NLT)** But Ruth replied, "Don't ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God."

Ruth saw Naomi's faith and made a very difficult choice to leave her family and their gods and become a follower, at all costs.

## C. The Application for Us Today

We find the beginning of God's grace when we come to the end of ourselves. When God is at work, even our bitter disappointments become a gateway for a fresh start with God.

If I was directing the movie of Ruth, I would go from a closeup of Naomi's grief in 1:21, with a minor key of music, to a drone shot of a distant barley field with the sun beams shining through the clouds. Then the music would make a subtle change to major key with music of hope. But wait... cut to commercial. **[Review]**

## 3. Even When we Face Ordinary Days... God is Still at Work!

### A. Their Ordinary Days...

Sometimes we don't know what to do, so we just start moving forward as best as we can. Ruth must have heard about how God had made provision for the poor in Israel and instructed the farmers to leave unharvested produce for the needy to glean. So, Ruth puts her head down and goes to work and was blessed with a huge harvest (2:17) an ephah is 35 liters, over 9 gallons, or about one US bushel, which is enough grain to feed

her family for a month.

#### B. Even in Their Ordinary Days, God Was Still at Work!

God is working most often in the ordinary. When it feels like the world has passed you by and God is distant, he calls you and says, "I know you by name, I see your heart and I'm still at work in your life."

##### 1. Enter Boaz.. [the story]

Boaz was a man of integrity and was greatly respected by everyone. He was known for his kindness and as a boss he knew how to treat his employees. He followed the law by making sure the poor were cared for. He saw Ruth's commitment (2:11-12) and encouraged her for her faithfulness to Naomi.

Boaz was not only a really nice and respected guy, he was also a "next of kin" to Elimelech. That gave Boaz the legal right to buy back the land that belonged to Elimelech and marry his widow. This was God's way of protecting someone in a situation exactly like Naomi.

Naomi's matchmaking – perhaps we've all participated to a certain degree.

(Thinking about our role as disciples, matchmaking people to Jesus. "It is good that you should hang around Jesus because in Satan's field you may be harmed.")

#### C. Application for Us Today

It's interesting to note that the word "Kinsman-Redeemer" is the same Hebrew word "gaal" (pronounced gaw-al) as the description of God as our divine redeemer, Yahweh. Christ, the divine provision became human to take on our sin and redeem us.

**Ephesians 1:7** (NLT) He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins.

### 4. Even When we Don't Understand God's Plans... God is Still at Work!

#### A. Our Seasons When We Don't Understand God's Plans

We have all had those seasons when nothing makes sense. Rewind the tough seasons in our Ruth story.

#### B. God is Still at Work!!!

**Ruth 4:13–17** (NLT) <sup>13</sup> So Boaz took Ruth into his home, and she became his wife. When he slept with her, the LORD enabled her to become pregnant, and she gave birth to a son. <sup>14</sup> Then the women of the town said to Naomi, “Praise the LORD, who has now provided a redeemer for your family! May this child be famous in Israel. <sup>15</sup> May he restore your youth and care for you in your old age. For he is the son of your daughter-in-law who loves you and has been better to you than seven sons!” <sup>16</sup> Naomi took the baby and cuddled him to her breast. And she cared for him as if he were her own. <sup>17</sup> The neighbor women said, “Now at last Naomi has a son again!” And they named him Obed. He became the father of Jesse and the grandfather of David.

God is working everything together for your good and His ultimate glory.

Boaz gets married and has the joy of passing along his faith to future generations. Naomi is now cared for and is found holding her grandson at the end of the story. Ruth gets married and has a son who will eventually appear in King David’s photo album and is in the family tree of the Messiah.

## Conclusion

Have you surrendered yourself to His sovereignty? Do you trust His purposes for your life, even when things look bleak? Have you discovered the glories of God still working in your life?

Following the example of Ruth, are you ready to follow Jesus?

When God made the promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 that all families would be blessed through him, we see that God has grafted in individuals like Rahab and Ruth in order to bring David into the world. Then, when we come to Matthew 1, we see that the lineage of Boaz and Ruth from Bethlehem ended up in David’s greater Son, born of a virgin in a stable in Bethlehem.

Eye has not seen, nor ear heard the things that God has prepared for them that love him.

As we share communion this morning, the disciples certainly did not understand when Jesus died on the cross. Even then, God was doing his most magnificent work, our redemption fulfilled through the promised one, the descendent of Ruth, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

Discussion questions:

1. Naomi followed her husband’s lead away from the Promised Land, into a foreign country with foreign customs. How do you think she felt in this new land?
2. Put yourself in Ruth’s shoes. After studying the history of her people, what sort of fears do you think Ruth had? When you make decisions, do you tend to take the

selfish route or the selfless route?

3. Read 2 Timothy 3:1–5 and compare to the description of the dark days during the book of Judges. It was a time of tribalism, chaos, violence, unchecked lawlessness, and tribal civil war. It was a time when “every man did what was right in their own eyes.” “They did as they saw fit.” Do you think the times we are living in resemble the dark days of the judges from the past? Explain your answer.
4. When we go through a tremendous loss like Naomi, losing her husband and sons, do you try to “cover over” all your pain and grieving? Or do you allow yourself to display your pain, knowing that God will win in the end. Is it easy for you to be authentic about your stretching seasons?
5. Can you give an example from your own life where it was difficult to trust God in the dark nights of the soul, yet, God was at work, guiding you to accomplish His plans and purposes?

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