

The Choice: *Trust* or *Tragedy* (1:1-5)

After the death of Joshua and the elders who outlived him “were gathered to their fathers, another generation arose who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel” (Judges 2:10). *Exchanging the truth of God for a lie* (Romans 1:25), God’s people chose to emulate the people of the nations and worship their gods. Angered by their indifference and unfaithfulness, God delivered them to their enemies to be subjugated and oppressed. “Moved by their distress, God rose up leaders (15 judges; Othniel through Samuel) who delivered them from their foes. But [for four hundred years] they persisted in the worship of other gods, or relapsed...when the judge died; each generation... worse than those before it. Neither punishment nor deliverance wrought any lasting amendment.”^{i ii}

God’s people acted according to what they believed to be spiritually and morally right (Judges 17:6). It is in the midst of their decline that we find the account of Elimelech, Naomi, and their sons, the consequences of sin weighing heavily upon them and their fellow Ephrathites.

Along with his brethren, Elimelech had a choice to make; a choice that would determine his future. He could submit to God and trust Him or chose his own way, come what may. If Elimelech chose the latter, he could be assured that his decision would *take him farther than he wanted to go, keep him longer than he wanted to stay, and cost him more than he wanted to pay.*ⁱⁱⁱ

Job 9:4 says, “God is wise in heart and mighty in strength. Who has hardened himself against Him and prospered?”

Read Ruth 1:1.

1. From its onset, providential crisis marks the book of Ruth. What pressure were the people of Bethlehem under?

2. In Deuteronomy 11:13-15 and 28:1-12, what did God promise to those who were faithful to Him?

3. What consequences would be experienced by those who chose to forsake Him? Read Deuteronomy 28:15-24, 38-40, Leviticus 26:18-20, and Judges 2:11-19.

Psalm 55:19b says, *“Because they do not change, therefore they do not fear God.”*

4. Based on the above verses, was the reason for their suffering? What would end their misery?
5. What did David say about the righteous in Psalm 37:25? What did Christ say regarding basic daily provisions in Matthew 6:25-26, 31-33?
6. Reconcile these declarations with Paul’s words in Romans 8:38-39, 2 Corinthians 11:27, and Philippians 4:12-13. What enabled him to make such bold statements?
7. Return to Ruth. Describe the difficulty of Elimelech’s decision.
8. While all Ephrathites (those who dwelt in Bethlehem) suffered, Elimelech made every effort to circumvent his circumstances to avoid suffering. His efforts may seem heroic, but what was his error?

9. Which of the following verbs appear to describe Elimelech's reaction to his travail? Circle all that apply. Then underline how you generally react to problems.

Avoid, hide, isolate, distance, run, push, control, blame, confront, persevere, trust, hope, other: _____.

10. Where did Elimelech seek asylum for his family? What did he leave behind?

11. Moab ("wash pot") was located some 60 miles from Bethlehem ("house of bread"), across the Jordan River, and outside of the Promised Land.

Who are the Moabites per Genesis 19:30-38? Describe their historical treatment of God's people. Read Numbers 25:1-9, Deuteronomy 23:3-6, and Judges 3:12-14.

Read Ruth 1:2.

12. Based on verse 1, how long did Elimelech intend to stay in the country of Moab? What does sojourning entail? What change occurred between verses 1 and 2?

13. Although Elimelech's family's physical needs were satisfied, his decision resulted in greater "famine". (Psalm 106:15) Why?^{iv}

14. Why couldn't he expect God's blessing? How might he have convinced himself otherwise? (Consider Psalm 73:1-19.)

15. What insight do the following names provide regarding their person and/or the nature of their circumstances?
- a. Elimelech means “My God is King.”
 - b. Naomi means “fair or pleasant.”
 - c. Mahlon means “sickly or infertile.”
 - d. Chilion means “pining, wearing away, extermination, or consumptive.”

Read Ruth 1:3-4.

16. What tragic loss was experienced by the family? How did this work against their hopes of prosperity?
17. What decisions were made shortly thereafter? What dictated their choices?
18. It is thought that Naomi encouraged her sons to take wives from among the Moabites in an attempt to secure a future and provide companionship. Why would this make it increasingly difficult to return to Bethlehem?
19. Read the following prohibitions against marriages to the Moabite people: Deuteronomy 7:1-11, 23:3-6, Nehemiah 13:1-3, 23-25, Ezra 9:1-4.

20. How long did Naomi and her sons persist in Moab?

21. What was still found wanting after 10 years of marriage?

Finally, read Ruth 1:5.

22. After a decade of disobedience, tragedy strikes again. The death of Elimelech and his sons has been attributed to the curses spoken by God in Deuteronomy 28:15-22. Reread this passage. What similarities do you see? What does this reveal about God's words?

In closing, Oswald Chambers has said, “[God] produces a providential crisis where we have to decide for or against and from that point the great divide begins.”^v

ⁱ Moore, G. F. (1910). *A critical and exegetical commentary on Judges* (pp. xv–xvi). New York: C. Scribner's Sons.

ⁱⁱ “With this background, Ruth serves as a transitional link between the period of lawlessness and the institution of the monarchy” (Nielsen, Kirsten. *Ruth: A Commentary*). Although the book is a beautiful account of God's *hesed* love and providence, its purpose appears to be the authentication of David's lineage and his right to possess the throne.

Although the author is unknown, Ruth was likely written by Samuel at the onset of David's reign. Yet others believe it was written during Solomon's rule. But throughout the narrative, God's prohibition against foreign marriages is upheld, standing in stark opposition to King Solomon's policy and practice regarding foreign marriages thus removing him as a possible author. It is also thought that David's Moabite origins may provide insight into his non-hostile and unusual trust relationship with the Moabites (1 Samuel 22:3-4).

ⁱⁱⁱ Zacharias, Ravi.

^{iv} Warren Wiersbe said, “A husband and father certainly wants to provide for his wife and family, but he must not do it at the expense of losing the blessing of God.”

^v Chambers, Oswald. *My Utmost for His Highest*. (January 1).