

The Choice: *Broken* or *Bitter* (1:19-22)

The woman they met at the gate was only a shadow of who she used to be. Pain was written upon her face; she was clothed with heartbreak disappointment and sorrow, and her speech was filled with contempt. But worse than her physical alteration was the change that had occurred in her heart. No longer pleasant, Naomi had become bitter—bitter toward life and toward God.

Years of sin and suffering had taken their toll, but unknown to her, God had led her to a place of restoration. She could relive the difficulties, losses, and mistakes of the past day after day, or she could allow God to repair and remake her—the choice was entirely hers.

“Only in returning to Me and resting in Me will you be saved. In quietness and confidence is your strength” (Isaiah 30:15a, NLT). *“[I] won’t brush aside the bruised and the hurt and [I] won’t disregard the small and insignificant, but [I’ll] steadily and firmly set things right”* (4:23, MSG).

Read Ruth 1:19-21.

1. How might returning home intensify Naomi’s pain?
2. How did the townspeople respond to Naomi’s unexpected arrival? (v.19)
3. What does their question suggest?
4. Read Psalm 32:3-4, 38:1-11, 39:8-11, 40:12, 44:15-16, 55:4-5, and Proverbs 17:22. What physical, mental, emotional effect can prolonged sin and trial have upon an individual?

5. Return to Ruth. How does Naomi respond to their bewilderment? (v.20-21)

6. While Naomi could not control the tragedies that befell her, what could she control?

7. Who was the object of her anger? Of what did Naomi accuse God?

8. Now think on the man Job. Like Naomi, he was stripped of his possessions and his family. Per Job 1:20-22 and 2:9-10, how did his reaction to adversity differ from Naomi's?ⁱ

What might be the reason for this? (Consider Job 1:1-12, 23:10-14.)

9. Return to Ruth. In verses 20 and 21, Naomi addresses God as “*the Almighty*”. This Hebrew name, “*El Shaddai*”, refers to God’s absolute power and sovereignty. It is often found in “passages that report God’s promises of fertility, land, and abundance to [the Israelites], indicating that He, the Almighty, *could* fulfill His promises (Gen. 17:1; 28:3; 35:11).”ⁱⁱ

What then is she accusing God of?

10. In addition, Pastor Warren Wiersbe states, “It is 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.” How does Psalm 9:10 oppose Naomi’s belief?

11. What is bitterness? How does one become bitter? How is bitterness displayed?

12. Does bitterness against God differ from bitterness against man? Does it begin and continue in the same way? Explain. (Think on Luke 7:23.)

13. Bitterness can be defined as anger, hurt, or resentment because of one's bad experiences or a sense of unjust treatment. It is the result of unforgiveness and ongoing unbridled emotions.

In Hebrews 12:15 bitterness is referred to as a root that “causes trouble” and has the potential to defile many. While this passage refers to “poisonous” doctrines entering the church, its Old Testament origin may offer insight into Naomi’s present state of mind and how she arrived there. Turn now to Deuteronomy 29 and read verses 18-19.

Step by step, list what occurred in the heart and mind of the individual in this passage that affected their view of God.

14. How can this belief lead to anger against God when faced with adverse circumstances?

15. Why was Naomi’s faith faltering? How might Naomi have come to believe that God sovereign, but without grace, compassion, and mercy?ⁱⁱⁱ

16. Return to Ruth. In verse 21, Naomi stated that she was empty. To what was she referring?

17. What dictated Naomi's "fullness"—her security, strength, joy and happiness? What danger lies in this? (Think on Matthew 10:37-39.)

18. According to Psalm 16:11, Ephesians 3:14-19, and 1 Peter 1:3-9, what results when one is filled with the fullness of God?

19. Back to Ruth. How had Naomi's emotional state blinded her to what God had provided? What things did she have? Consider Ruth's vow. (1:16-17)

20. Additionally, how did God see that her physical needs as a widow were met? Read Deuteronomy 10:18, 24:19-21, and Psalm 68:5-6a.

Read Ruth 1:22.

21. What purpose might the author have had in reporting the arrival of Naomi and Ruth in Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest at this juncture in the account?

“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’. Naomi was about to make a new beginning; for with God, it’s never too late to start over again.”^{iv}

ⁱ While neither Naomi nor Job believed that they deserved such treatment (Job 27:2-6), Job refrained from accusing God, indicting His character,^j and doubting His purposes, while Naomi publicly faulted Him.

ⁱⁱ Baker, W., & Carpenter, E. E. (2003). *The complete word study dictionary: Old Testament* (p. 1106). Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

ⁱⁱⁱ “Unable to see human causation in Israel’s famine and in her own trials, the woman the neighbors greet is a bitter old woman. She does indeed ascribe sovereignty to God, but this is a sovereignty without grace, an omnipotent power without compassion, a judicial will without mercy.” (Block, D. I. (1999). *Judges, Ruth* (Vol. 6, p. 647). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.)

^{iv} Wiersbe, Warren. (2003). *The Bible Exposition Commentary: Old Testament History*. (p. 184). Colorado Springs, CO: Cook Communications.