

# Exegetical Notes for Ruth 1:3-5

## KEY

**Barber** = *Ruth: An Exegetical Commentary* (Cyril J. Barber). Chicago: Moody Press, 1983.

**BBC** = *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*. Edited by John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews and Mark W. Chavalas. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.

**Block** = Block, Daniel I., *Judges, Ruth in the New American Commentary, Vol 6*. Edited by E. Ray Clendenen. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1999.

**Bush** = Bush, Frederick. *Ruth/Esther in the Word Biblical Commentary, Vol 9*. Edited by David H. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker. Dallas: Word Books, 1996.

**Campbell** = Campbell, Edward F., *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary in The Anchor Bible, Vol 7*. Edited by William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman. Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1975.

**Harrison** = *Introduction to the Old Testament* (R.K. Harrison). Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1969.

**K&D** = Keil, C.F. and Delitzsch, F. in the *Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament, Vol 2*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1989.

**MBC** = MacArthur, John. *The MacArthur Bible Commentary*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005.

**PC** = *The Pulpit Commentary: Ruth*. (H. D. M. Spence-Jones, Ed.). London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909.

**TWOT** = *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (R. Laird Harris; Gleason L. Archer, Jr.; Bruce Waltke). Chicago: Moody Press, 1980. Two Volumes.

**UBS** = *A Translator's Handbook on the Book of Ruth* (2nd ed.) (Waard, J. d., & Nida, E. A.). New York: United Bible Societies, 1991.

**Wood** = *Distressing Days of the Judges* (Leon Wood). Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975.

**Wiersbe** = *Be Committed. "Be" Commentary Series* (Wiersbe, W. W. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993.

## Three Steps of Exegesis

1. **Translation.** Work through a transliteration of the text and translate the passage directly, if possible.
2. **Exegesis.** Detailed exegesis of the passage by way of a "shot-gun" approach, using various exegetical tools.
  - Work from critical commentaries to practical.
  - Word studies and cross-references (analogy of the faith).
  - Applicational analysis - applicational issues arising from the text.
  - Theological analysis - theological issues arising from the text.
3. **Structural Analysis.** Diagram the passage developing a detailed outline and central proposition.
  - Smooth away all of the wrinkles.
  - The process is to yield an accurate "statue" as I chisel away the debris.

### Basic English Diagram

3 Then

Elimelech,

Naomi's husband,

died;

and she was left

with her two sons.

4 And

they took for themselves Moabite women

as wives;

the name of the one was Orpah  
and the name of the other Ruth.

And

they lived there about ten years.

5 Then

both Mahlon and Chilion also died;

and the woman was bereft

of her two children

and her husband.

## TRANSLATION, OUTLINE AND CENTRAL PROPOSITION

### HEBREW TEXT (BHS):

Verse 3:

וַיָּמָת אֱלִימֶלֶךְ אִישׁ נַעֲמִי וְהַתְּשָׂאֵר הִיא וּשְׁנֵי בָנֶיהָ

Verse 4:

וַיִּשְׂאוּ לָהֶם נָשִׁים מִאֲבוֹת שֵׁם הָאֶחָת עֹרְפָּה וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִית רֹוּת וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם כְּעֶשֶׂר שָׁנִים:

Verse 5:

וַיָּמָוּתוּ גַם־שְׁנֵיהֶם מַחֲלוֹן וְכִלְיוֹן וְהַתְּשָׂאֵר הָאִשָּׁה מִשְׁנֵי יְלָדֶיהָ וּמְאִישָׁהּ:

### ENGLISH TRANSLATION (NASB):

3 Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left with her two sons. 4 And they took for themselves Moabite women as wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. And they lived there about ten years. 5 Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died; and the woman was bereft of her two children and her husband.

### PASSAGE / BOOK OUTLINE:

I. Act One: The Royal Line with Hope in Ruin (1:1-22)

- A. Scene One: Retreat from Bethlehem (vv. 1-2)
- B. Scene Two: Ruin in Moab (vv. 3-5)
- C. Scene Three: Returning to Bethlehem (vv. 6-22)

II. Act Two: The Royal Line with Hope Renewed (2:1-23)

- A. Scene One: Ruth Reaping (vv. 1-7)
- B. Scene Two: Ruth Rewarded - Part 1 (vv. 8-13)
- C. Scene Three: Ruth Rewarded - Part 2 (vv. 14-17)
- D. Scene Four: Ruth Reports (vv. 18-23)

III. Act Three: The Royal Line with Hope at Risk (3:1-18)

- A. Scene One: Remedy Proposed (vv. 1-5)
- B. Scene Two: Reception or Rejection (vv. 6-15)

C. Scene Three: Resting in Providence (vv. 16-18)

IV. Act Four: The Royal Line with Hope Restored (4:1-17)

A. Scene One: Resolving Legal Matters (vv. 1-12)

B. Scene Two: Romance and Redemption (vv. 13-17)

Epilogue - Royal Rights and The Resultant Redeemer (4:18-22)

**SERMON OUTLINE:**

I. Act One: The Royal Line with Hope in Ruin (1:1-22)

A. Scene One: Retreat from Bethlehem (vv. 1-2)

B. Scene Two: Ruin in Moab (vv. 3-5)

1. First Crisis in Moab: Elimelech Dies

2. Interlude of Hope: Wives for Two Sons

3. Second Crisis: Hope Dashed in Death

C. Scene Three: Returning to Bethlehem (vv. 6-22)

**PASSAGE SUBJECT/THEME (what's t/passage talking about):**

**PASSAGE COMPLEMENT/THRUST (what's t/passage saying about what it's talking about):**

**PASSAGE MAIN IDEA (central proposition of the text):**

**CENTRAL PROPOSITION OF THE SERMON:** God is bigger than your crisis

**SERMONIC IDEA/TITLE:**

## HISTORICAL/CULTURAL/GRAMMATICAL CONTEXT

### I. Act One: The Royal Line with Hope in Ruin (1:1-22)

A. Scene One: Retreat from Bethlehem (vv. 1-2)

B. Scene Two: Ruin in Moab (vv. 3-5)

During the time of the Judges, Israel repeatedly turned from God and worshiped the idols of the heathen nations around them; and God had to discipline them (Jdg. 2:10–19). The godly had to suffer because of the ungodly, even in Bethlehem.

The decision. When trouble comes to our lives, we can do one of three things: endure it, escape it, or enlist it. If we only endure our trials, then trials become our master, and we have a tendency to become hard and bitter. If we try to escape our trials, then we will probably miss the purposes God wants to achieve in our lives. But if we learn to enlist our trials, they will become our servants instead of our masters and work for us; and God will work all things together for our good and His glory (Rom. 8:28). [Wiersbe, 14]

## 1:3 EXEGESIS

HEBREW TEXT / INTERLINEAR:

וַיָּמָת אֱלִימֶלֶךְ אִישׁ נַעֲמִי וַתִּשְׂאֵר הִיא וּשְׁנֵי בָנֶיהָ  
her sons and two (of) she and was left behind Naomi husband Elimelech And he died

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וַתִּשְׂאֵר (שְׂאֵר) = "to be left over, to remain" || Niphal). A word that speak of bereavement at the death of another [Block, 627] (cf. Gen. 7:23; 14:10; 42:38; Ex. 14:28). Also used of those who have survived the wrath and judgment of God [Block] (Lev. 26:36,39; Deut. 4:27; 28:62; Ezek. 34:21; 9:8; Zech. 11:9)

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ENGLISH TRANSLATION [NASB]:

**Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left with her two sons.**

CONTEXTUAL, GRAMMATICAL, THEOLOGICAL, APPLICATIONAL ANALYSIS:

**Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died;**

וַיָּמָת אֱלִימֶלֶךְ אִישׁ נַעֲמִי

Why did he die? Some believe that this was a judgment from God - he died because he left the promised land that was itself under judgment (famine) and rather than repenting so that God would relent from the judgment (famine) he skipped town to a pagan land, Moab. But this is reading too much into the story. No indication that his death was due to his disobedience. He simply died. He probably was aged.

However, to be buried in a foreign land, and not in Israel, was considered a punishment (Amos 7:17).

Plight of the widow in the ancient Near East. Cf. how this extends to the first century (1 Tim. 5).

**and she was left with her two sons.**

וַתִּשְׂאֵר הִיא וּשְׁנֵי בָנֶיהָ

She is no longer a wife. And her children no longer have a father. She assumes the unwelcome role of being the head of the family.

This is the point of the second scene. Naomi was left alone in a strange land. Her sons were also left alone in a strange land. She didn't have her husband to lead her. They didn't have their father to lead them.

We assume that they were farming in Moab. So the sons would have taken up the bulk of the work in tending the farm.

**1:4 EXEGESIS**

HEBREW TEXT / INTERLINEAR:

וַיִּשְׂאוּ לָהֶם נָשִׁים מִאֲבוֹתַיִם שֵׁם הָאִחָת עֹרְפָּה וְשֵׁם הַשְּׁנִיית  
the second (other) and the name of Orpah the one the name of Moabite wives for them And they lifted up  
רוּת וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם כְּעֶשֶׂר שָׁנִים:  
years about ten there And they lived Ruth

ENGLISH TRANSLATION [NASB]:

**And they took for themselves Moabite women as wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. And they lived there about ten years.**

CONTEXTUAL, GRAMMATICAL, THEOLOGICAL, APPLICATIONAL ANALYSIS:

**And they took for themselves Moabite women as wives;**

וַיִּשְׂאוּ לָהֶם נָשִׁים מִאֲבוֹתַיִם

They were likely young when they left Bethlehem. So coming of age in Moab they marry.

Hope for the royal line revived.

The Hebrew expression here translated married occurs only in Old Testament literature of a later period. It is true that the same expression does occur in Judges 21:23, but it is in a context which concerns the abduction of women, literally in the sense of “to take wives.” As such, the expression carries an important component of sex, not only in Hebrew but also in many receptor languages. [UBS]

**the name of the one was Orpah**

שֵׁם הָאִחָת עֹרְפָּה

From a word meaning "neck." Jewish midrashic explanation is that she turned her neck (turned away) from her mother in law.

**and the name of the other Ruth.**

וְשֵׁם הַשְּׁנִיית רוּת

In Hebrew the proper name Orpah sounds like “rebellious,” and Ruth sounds like “refreshing.” Etymologists have speculated considerably concerning possible implications of the use of these names, but there is no certainty as to the historical background or the meaning. [UBS]

Meaning is obscure. Root "to soak, irrigate, refresh". The Syriac renders it female friend ("friendship"?). According to 4:10 she was Mahlon's wife.

What about Israelites marrying Moabite women? Cf. previous notes on how despised the Moabites were. One of the Jewish Targum says that they "transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and took foreign wives from among the daughters of Moab."

Deuteronomy 23:3 "No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the LORD; none of their descendants, even to the tenth generation, shall ever enter the assembly of the LORD,

How is this marriage to Moabites to be evaluated? The narrator does not declare his own opinion, but several features of the account may be telling. First, he employs an unusual expression to announce their marriages, *nasa? ?iššâ*, literally "to lift/carry a woman," instead of *laqa? ?iššâ*, "to take a woman," the more common idiom for "to marry." Although lexicons tend to treat these expressions as virtually synonymous, closer examination of the latter reveals a phrase loaded with negative connotations. The present idiom occurs only nine times in the Old Testament. As we have seen, in Judg 21:23 it speaks of marriage by abduction: with the consent of the rest of the Israelites, the Benjamites forcibly seized the dancers at Shiloh and took them as wives. It appears that because most marriages by abduction would be exogamous (outside the clan), in later usage this idiom came to be used mainly of illegitimate marriages, especially with non-Israelites, whether by kings or laymen.<sup>31</sup> The present usage fits the latter class. Second, these marriages must be interpreted in light of Mosaic prohibitions against marriage with pagans, particularly Deut 7:3–4. The Moabites are not listed with these Canaanite nations, but since they were the people of Chemosh, a foreign God, the spirit of the law would have them included. As the new head of this household, Naomi should have forestalled these marriages. Third, like Elimelech's movement to Moab in the first place, according to the covenant curses, marriage to foreigners in the land of exile was considered the judgment of God (Deut 28:32). Fourth, Naomi's sons lived in their married state for ten years but without fathering any children. The barrenness of Ruth and Orpah too must be interpreted as evidence of the punitive though hidden hand of God (Deut 28:18). Indeed later it would take an act of God to enable Ruth, who had been barren, to conceive and bear a son for Boaz (4:13). Fifth, the climactic blow is struck when both Mahlon and Chilion die (1:5), leaving Naomi with no male remnant, neither husband nor children. The poignancy of the situation is highlighted by the construction of v. 5 (lit. "and even their two died—Mahlon and Chilion") and the designation of the sons as *yeladîm*, "children," rather than the conventional *banîm*, "sons" (vv. 1–3, 11–12). The choice of this word here creates an *inclusio* with *hayyeled* in 4:16 and highlights the issue of progeny as a key theme in the book. [Block, 628–629]

Josephus, reproducing the narrative from memory, represents the event as occurring in the father's lifetime, and as brought about by his arrangement. He says of Elimelech, "Coming into the territory of Moab, he sojourns there, and, things prospering according to his mind, he gives in marriage to his sons (??eta? t??? ?????) Moabish wives." Theological critics have here again raised the question, Was it sinful in these emigrant Hebrews to take in marriage daughters of the land? The Chaldee Targumist did not hesitate in his decision. He begins his paraphrase of the verse thus: "And they transgressed the edict of the word of the Lord, and took to themselves alien wives of the daughters of Moab." Dr. Thomas Fuller represents Naomi as passionately remonstrating with her sons. He says of himself. "My mouth denieth to be the orator of an unjust action." "Nothing can be brought," he adds, "for the defence of these matches.

Something may be said for the excuse of them, but that fetched not from piety, but from policy.” It is noteworthy, however, that in the text itself, and throughout the entire Book, there is nothing of the nature of condemnation, not the least hint of blame. There was a law, indeed, which laid an interdict upon marriages with Canaanites (see Deut. 7:3). But these Canaanites occupied a peculiar relation to the Hebrews. They were within the line of that Canaan which had become the land of Israel. Israelites and Canaanites were thus living within the same borders as rival claimants of the same territory. It was no wonder that the Canaanites’ claim was not to be recognised by the Hebrews. The Moabites, however, living within the lines or “coasts” of their own distinct territory, stood in quite a different relation. And while, for purity’s sake, great restrictions were to be laid upon all overtures for naturalisation (Deut. 23:3–6), yet the law could never be intended to apply to the families of Hebrews who were settlers in Moab, or to Moabitish females living in their own land, and rather awarding than seeking the prerogatives of natives. [PC]

What was Naomi's response to her sons marrying Moabite women? Whatever it was, she was resolute once they were married to be the best mother-in-law one could ever hope for. (Naomi as the Proverbs 31 woman). Application to having a child marry someone you think is not a good choice. Maybe not a godly choice // unequally yoked. (Cf. illustration of dad's friend and his now father in law).

**And they lived there about ten years.**

וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם כְּעֶשֶׂר שָׁנִים:

About ten years later is a reference to the time that Mahlon and Chilion lived in Moab—in other words, the time that the family had been there. The ten years should not be counted from the time of Elimelech’s death. [UBS]

That's a decade in Moab living as a family of a widow, her two sons, and their two Moabite wives.

10 years of suffering. They ran away from famine in order to escape death and ran into the arms of death in escaping famine.

## 1:5 EXEGESIS

HEBREW TEXT / INTERLINEAR:

וַיָּמָוּתוּ גַם־שְׁנֵיהֶם מַחֲלֹן וְכִלְיוֹן וְהַתְּשָׂאֵר הָאִשָּׁה מִשְׁנֵי  
from without the two (of) the woman and (she) was left behind and Chilion Mahlon also the two of them but they died  
וְיָלְדָהּ וּמֵאִשְׁהָ:  
and without her husband her male children

ENGLISH TRANSLATION [NASB]:

**Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died; and the woman was bereft of her two children and her husband.**

CONTEXTUAL, GRAMMATICAL, THEOLOGICAL, APPLICATIONAL ANALYSIS:

**Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died;**

וַיָּמָוּתוּ גַם־שְׁנֵיהֶם מַחֲלֹן וְכִלְיוֹן

Talmuds suggest this was God's judgment. However, that doesn't seem to be indicated in the text. After all, this was ten years later. May be argued that God was patient and that it does seem strange that they both would have died around the same time at a rather young age.

No children.

But it's really incidental to the story. The point below.

**and the woman was bereft of her two children and her husband.**

וְהַתְּשָׂאֵר הָאִשָּׁה מִשְׁנֵי יָלְדָהּ וּמֵאִשְׁהָ:

The Hebrew literally reads as follows: “the woman was bereft of her two sons and her husband.” Chronologically Elimelech died first, and Mahlon and Chilion afterward. It may be important, therefore, to reverse the order, as some ancient versions have done, so that the phrase reads Naomi was left all alone, without husband or sons. In addition there may be a cultural reason in some languages to mention the husband before the sons. [UBS]

Elimelech is out of the picture. The story centers on Naomi.

As for hope for the royal line . . . . ?

There is a point to be made regarding God's sovereignty over our decisions. Sometimes the decisions we make are wrong. May have been that the decisions made up to this point in the story were wrong. Decision to leave Bethlehem for godless Moab. Decision to marry Moabite women. Decision to stay in

Moab 10 years. God is sovereign over all of our decisions. I've known people who were afraid to make any decision feeling they might make the wrong one. Failure to apprehend God's sovereignty.

This also isn't licence to do something we know is wrong. God may be in control no matter what we do; God may use our stupidity to further His will; but we are still accountable. For example - someone who marries an unbeliever.

Now three widows.

Tragedy upon tragedy in the space of 5 vv.

Amos 5:19 As when a man flees from a lion, And a bear meets him; Or goes home, leans his hand against the wall, And a snake bites him.

Ver. 5.—And, to make a long story short, Machlon and Chilion died also both of them. “Like green apples,” says Fuller, “cudgelled off the tree.” But why “cudgelled”? There is no evidence in the text of Divine displeasure, and the Christian expositor, when going beyond the text in quest of principles, should not forget the tower of Siloam, and the victims of Pilate’s bloodthirstiness (see Luke 13:1–5). And the woman was left of her two children and of her husband. That is, “of her two children as well as of her husband.” She became as it were their relict too. She remained behind after they had gone on before. If all sentiment were to be taken out of the expression, it might then be simply said, in very commonplace prose, she survived them. Poor woman! “Of the two sexes,” says Fuller, “the woman is the weaker; of women, old women are most feeble; of old women, widows most woeful; of widows, those that are poor, their plight most pitiful; of poor widows, those who want children, their case most doleful; of widows that want children, those that once had them, and after lost them, their estate most desolate; of widows that have had children, those that are strangers in a foreign country, their condition most comfortless. Yet all these met together in Naomi, as in the centre of sorrow, to make the measure of her misery pressed down, shaken together, running over. I conclude, therefore, many men have had affliction—none like Job; many women have had tribulation—none like Nomi.” [UBS]

The consequences. The name Elimelech means “my God is king.” But the Lord was not king in Elimelech’s life, for he left God completely out of his decisions. He made a decision out of God’s will when he went to Moab, and this led to another bad decision when his two sons married women of Moab. Mahlon married Ruth (Ruth 4:10), and Chilion married Orpah. Jews were forbidden to marry Gentile women, especially those from Ammon and Moab (Deut. 7:1–11; 23:3–6; Neh. 13:1–3; Ezra 9:1–4). It was the Moabite women in Moses’ day who seduced the Jewish men into immorality and idolatry; and as a result, 24,000 people died (Num. 25).

Elimelech and his family had fled Judah to escape death, but the three men met death just the same. The family had planned only to “sojourn” temporarily in Moab, but they remained for ten years (Ruth 1:4). At the end of that decade of disobedience, all that remained were three lonely widows and three Jewish graves in a heathen land. Everything else was gone (v. 21). Such is the sad consequence of unbelief.

We can't run away from our problems. We can't avoid taking with us the basic cause of most of our problems, which is an unbelieving and disobedient heart. "The majority of us begin with the bigger problems outside and forget the one inside," wrote Oswald Chambers. "A man has to learn 'the plague of his own heart' before his own problems can be solved ..." (The Shadow of an Agony, p. 76). [Wiersbe, 16]