



RUTH

LOIS ENGELBART

EDITED BY ROBERT WOLFF

LIVING WAY
BIBLE STUDY



LWBS

LIVING WAY BIBLE STUDY

Welcome to Living Way Bible Study

Thank you for your order! It is our prayer that the Holy Spirit will use this study to help you grow in your knowledge and appreciation of our God and His Word. *"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."* 2 Peter 3:18

WHO WE ARE

Living Way Bible Study, Inc. is an auxiliary of the Pacific Southwest District of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS). All studies are written and/or edited by LCMS pastors. We have been providing studies to churches throughout the U.S. and Canada since 1982.

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These studies are available by email (pdf-file) or snail-mail (hard copy). For a *suggested* donation of \$1-per-lesson within a study (e.g., 23-lesson study of John is \$23) you receive an original of the study, from which you are then free to make copies for your class. Please honor our copyright of these materials.

All studies have the same basic format, using an effective four-step approach for Bible study. Please see the following pages for additional information on these four steps, as well as helpful hints for facilitating these studies.

As a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization that relies solely on freewill donations, *additional donations are much appreciated* and enable us to continue to produce and promote the study of God's Word.

CONTACT US

If you have any questions or comments on this study or any part of it, please contact us. We are always eager to hear from "our students" and appreciate your comments.

May God bless you as you walk in His Living Way!

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LWBS Four-Step Method

Living Way Bible Study suggests this four-step method:

- 1. PERSONAL** – The student prays for guidance from the Holy Spirit and answers the Personal Application (P.A.) questions at home using only the Bible (no commentaries).
- 2. SMALL GROUPS** – The class meets for an opening and divides into small groups of 8–10 people. The small group leader guides the group through the P.A. questions, encouraging each to share their answers and discuss further as time allows.
- 3. THE MESSAGE** – The lecture or message is given by a pastor or layperson who has researched the material and presents the study, giving personal insight and augmenting, but not duplicating, the author's comments.
- 4. THE NARRATIVE** – The author's comments or narrative, along with the P.A. questions for the next lesson, are given out at the end of the class. At the next class meeting, before answering the P.A. questions, the small groups may choose to review the author's comments of the last lesson, and share what each has highlighted as meaningful or important.

Each lesson should be stapled together according to the number of the lesson in the right-hand corner of the page. The P.A. questions for the next week should be attached after the author's narrative for the current week, as they will be the home study for the next class session.

The first meeting of the class is an introduction to the study. Since the members of the small groups have no P.A. questions to discuss at the first meeting, they may use the time to get acquainted or to tell what they hope to receive by studying this course. At the first meeting, the lecturer presents background information about the course, using the Introduction lesson as a guide.

With this four-step method the student has the opportunity to study the particular section of Scripture covered by the lesson from four different approaches. This emphasizes the Bible text and gives the student an understanding and ownership for each section studied.



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What our Students are Saying...

Lakeside Community Lutheran Church (Webster, WI): “Our Bible Study in Genesis is in full swing and I had to let you know so far it is a great success. We have been struggling for some time attracting people to our studies and finally I think we have hit the jackpot! We have a full house (room) of enthusiastic, constant participants, including MEN! Our lessons are animated to say the least and everyone participates fully. ... We have been using your studies since 2003 and really enjoy them as they are very precise and informative, easy to understand and uplifting.”

Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church (Anza, CA): “We will be beginning our fourth year of Living Way Bible Study... It has been such a blessing for our church...nurturing the women of our congregation and as an outreach to our community. The Lord has blessed us with women from the community and brought at least three of them into membership in our church.”

Palisades Lutheran Church (Pacific Palisades, CA): “Our breakfast Prayer Group again finds your studies helpful and rewarding.”

St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church (Stryker, OH - Pastor): “Our group leaders are very pleased with the additional background information that is provided with Living Way courses.”

Faith Lutheran Church (Sequim, WA): “Currently in our 10th year ...continue to be blessed... have between 70-90+ men and women... some are non-members of our church... use to plug new members in.”

St. James Lutheran Church (Cleveland, OH): “...we greatly appreciate the ministry of Living Way Bible Study! They're all very good! ...”

Faith Lutheran Church (Sequim, WA): “I'm looking forward to our study that your ministry has blessed us with ... Your study allows one to go as deep as time permits or give the simplest most direct answer ... providing materials for us to become proficient in His living and active Word.”

Holy Cross Lutheran Church (San Diego, CA): “The women...continue to enjoy the lessons you provide. We have had many lively discussions over the questions in the lessons.”

Lakeside Community Lutheran Church (Webster, WI - ELCA): “Your studies are excellent and we look forward to each study we undertake.”

Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd (Olympia, WA - ELCA): “We're starting into year 12!...We've been enjoying all of the studies and appreciate your service.”

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church (Tacoma, WA): “Living Way Bible Study has been an excellent study that we have used for almost 30 years.”

Bethany Lutheran Church (Long Beach, CA): “We are going on our 30th year in LWBS. Our group of about 40 really loves it and grows in our faith with each new study.”

Crown of Life Lutheran Church (Sun City, AZ): “I used the Thessalonians study for the Ministry Staff Retreat (7 of us) and will be repeating a small portion of the study for a three week session with approximately 50 adults. The material is excellent and very helpful to me as I prepare to teach.”



Ruth

LOIS ENGELBART

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Popular Commentary, Kretzmann



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This study of Ruth is dedicated to my beloved husband, Warren, who went to be with Jesus on January 16, 2011 while I was working on these lessons.



FACTS RELATING TO THE BOOK OF RUTH

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“Heavenly Father, as we begin our study of Ruth, turn our eyes upward so that we are mindful of the constant care which only You can give us. Amen.”

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

As we begin this wonderful account of Ruth, many of you will revisit personal losses which the Lord has allowed to become a part of your heritage.

It is my prayer that the “Lord of Life” will use these lessons to lift saddened hearts, to brighten futures which may seem dark, and ultimately bring His Love and His Joy into each bereft heart and trouble-filled life.

INTRODUCTION

The book of Ruth is one of the earliest dramas of human literature. It has been called, “the loveliest, small entity handed down to us.” (Goethe) Ruth is the account of two remarkable women, held by God’s enduring grace. We will see God turn their loss into gain and their sorrow into joy. That is what He desires to do in each of our lives.

Most books begin with life and end with death. That is the natural course of events with which each of us is familiar. “All men are like grass and all their glory is like the flowers of the field...the grass withers and the flowers fall...” (Isaiah 40:6, 8) All of life moves from life to death, in time.

The book of Ruth is strangely different. It begins with death but then leads to life — the lives of the ancestors of the “Lord of Life,” Jesus, our Savior. As we study this short, but profound, book of the Bible, let us remain aware of the reverse nature of its contents — Death to Life.

The book of Ruth parallels many of our lives. We are born sinful, human beings with spiritual death as our destination. But, once we have been confronted by the “Lord of Life,” our destiny becomes Life — eternal life spent with our Savior now and into eternity.

It was the death of Naomi’s husband, Elimelech, and her two sons, Mahlon and Kilion, that prompted Naomi to return to her godly ancestors in Bethlehem. This is the very place where our Savior, the “Lord of Life,” would one day be born.

While we study this beautiful account of two of God's women in distress, we will see the hand of God providing for their desperate needs again and again. God is never far from each of us and He does see every heartache, concern and need we experience. Naomi's account of God standing alongside her, during her time of grief, is His way of telling each of us that no matter where we are, or what we are facing, He is right there with His provisions, comfort and aid. God knew the needs of both Naomi and Ruth, and lovingly places them together as a family.

As we journey through this loving story of God's grace, care and almost unbelievable blessing given to Naomi and to Ruth, we ask God to help us step into their shoes and realize, along with them, just how precious we are in God's sight. We also ask God to help us realize how carefully He guards our lives, knowing that our journey here in this life is guided and directed by Him.

Naomi had no reason to expect God's blessings; Ruth had no reason to expect His blessings. But, we serve a loving God who stands with us in good times as well as bad times. "Jehovah Jirah," our provider, was at the center of Naomi's and Ruth's lives.

We will see how each tragedy, each seemingly insurmountable obstacle that confronted the women was used by God to draw the women closer to Himself. He does the same in our lives.

Ruth contains many and various accounts of family life with its problems and God's interventions and solutions. Problems arise in everyone's life — some great and seemingly insurmountable, and others miniscule by comparison. God has created us as dependent people in need of Him.

As we study this wonderful account, I pray that we will all become aware of the magnificence of God's plan for our lives and our own inadequate ability to solve many problems that God alone can solve.

The book of Ruth is a love story. Love is the strong bond that holds its main characters together during difficult times. God's love (Agape) is on display in the lives of Naomi, Ruth and Boaz.

There is a theme of Redemption running throughout the book of Ruth. It is mentioned 23 times. Watch for it and thank God for His great Redemption earned for us and freely given to each of us who are His children. We are all sinners in need of a "Kinsman-Redeemer." Thank God. He has given us a "Kinsman-Redeemer." His name is Jesus.

FACTS RELATING TO THE BOOK OF RUTH

- † In the ancient canon of Scripture, Judges and Ruth formed but one book.
- † Ruth was the wife of Mahlon.
- † Ruth was prescribed reading in the Jewish Liturgy at Pentecost.
- † Ruth introduces another gentile woman into the lineage of Jesus.
- † Ruth is unique in that it does not point out anyone's sin.
- † Ruth contains the first mention of David. By doing so it narrows the lineage of the Messiah from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to David. Jesus would one day call Himself the "Son of David."

CONCLUSION

Our society today abounds with mother-in-law jokes. Some are perhaps deserved, but most come from a critical spirit — not God's spirit of forgiveness and love. The account of Ruth squelches any suggestions of such jokes. It portrays familial love in its finest form. Every family would do well to read God's account of this godly, strife-free, family of believers. Heavenly Father, as we begin our study of Ruth, turn our eyes upward so that we are mindful of the constant care which only You can give us. Amen.

PERSONAL APPLICATION – RUTH 1:1-5

Heavenly Father, as we begin our study of Ruth, turn our eyes upward so that we are mindful of the constant care which only You can give us. Amen.

1. When did the events in the book of Ruth take place?

2. What difficulty was the nation of Israel currently facing?

3. Why might God be allowing His people to face this problem? (Deuteronomy 28:15, 23 & 24)

4. Write the names of the family members who were facing this problem.

5. To which tribe did they belong?

6. Trace this tribe's history and give some information related to it. (Genesis 29:31-35; Genesis 49:8-12; Genesis 44:18 & 33)

7. Which city did they live in? What immediately comes to mind when you hear this city's name (Luke 2:4) _

8. To which country did the family flee?

9. Who was the founder of this country? (Genesis 19:36 & 37)

10. The family fled to avoid starvation. What happened to the father while he was fleeing from death by starvation?

11. Naomi was left with her two sons. What dual role now confronted her?

12. Make a list of extra work which would now become Naomi's responsibility.

13. Next, make a list of responsibilities which you would have to undertake were you to lose your spouse.

14. Naomi was left with her two sons, Mahlon and Kilion. Who did they choose to marry? Do you think Naomi was pleased with their choice of mates?

15. State your opinion of mixed marriages (race, religion, culture, nationality). Does it line up with God's Word? (2 Corinthians 6:14-18)

16. How did their two marriages end? (Ruth 1:5)

17. What common bond did Naomi now share with her two daughters-in-law?

18. What does the Lord tell us we should do when facing difficult times like the three women faced? (Matthew 11:28 & 29)

19. If we see someone going through difficult times, what call has the Lord placed on our lives? (Galatians 6:2)

20. If you have lived Galatians 6:2, please share your experience.



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“Whenever mutual burdens are borne with the Lord’s guidance, care and compassion, be sure that a strong bond will be formed between those individuals bearing each other’s burdens.”

FAMINE STALKS ISRAEL – RUTH 1:1-2

We are all familiar with the devastating scenes of famine that are taking place in our world today. We view starving people on television and the internet. Since our nation has been blessed with plenty, we often become callous to the terrible conditions that exist in third world countries, and even in poverty pockets in our own country.

Starvation was the problem that Elimelech was facing. His home in Bethlehem (house of bread) could no longer be called Bethlehem. The sky overhead had become like bronze and the ground beneath him like iron. The rain had been turned into dust and powder — as the Lord had prophesied in Deuteronomy 28:23-24. The book of Judges tells us there was great disobedience in Israel.

Elimelech’s wife, Naomi, was a woman much like many of us. She was married to a man whose faith she shared and they had a family — two sons, Mahlon and Kilion.

Since Elimelech was a godly man and his family was being placed in a situation that compromised their ability to physically survive, he acted. There was bread in Moab, so Moab became his destination.

While commending his action to save his family’s physical lives, there is no mention of his care for their spiritual lives. Moab was founded by Lot’s incestuous relation with one of his daughters, after fleeing from Sodom. (Genesis 19:36-37) Moab was filled with false gods; the chief false god was Chemosh, whose worship included child sacrifice. Moab was not a good choice in which to live, but Elimelech only planned to stay a short time — long enough to feed his starving family.

Historians tell us that Elimelech had chosen to remain in the open country and not settle down in one of Moab's cities where idolatry was much more prolific. This was a wise choice. However, the Moabites also lived in the surrounding rural areas. This was Moab territory, not Israel. False gods were the rule of the land.

NAOMI, THE WIDOW – RUTH 1:3-5

Elimelech's decision to have only a short stay in Moab became a reality for him. His desire to flee from death by starvation did not prevent death from other sources. We are not told what caused Elimelech's death, only that he died, leaving his wife and two sons living as strangers in an unfamiliar and ungodly land. Naomi, while mourning her husband's death, now became the head of the family. She was left with responsibilities to be met.

None of us can flee from death. It surrounds us every day in hundreds of ways. But death can either be our friend or our enemy. St. Paul calls death our last enemy. (1 Corinthians 15:26) He then adds that we who belong to the Lord have victory over our last enemy. "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 15:57)

Naomi, rather than becoming despondent and bitter at the death of her husband, Elimelech, now not only allowed her sons to marry Moabite women, but she became their close friend and mentor. Certainly they had heard accounts about the God of Israel, but they had never had a personal encounter with Him.

This was about to change because of one woman who, although she was living in a strange land among people worshiping strange gods, had the courage to hold onto her faith by acknowledging Jehovah as her God.

Jesus would have the apostle John write letters to seven churches centuries later commending the church in Pergamum for holding onto their faith in Him, even while living where Satan had his throne. (Revelation 2:13) Jesus' words could describe Naomi. She remained true to her God, Jehovah, even though she was living in a country where Satan had a stronghold.

The last verse of Judges tells us that everyone was doing

what was right in their own eyes — not God's eyes. But there was one exception, Naomi. She was living in a strange land with strange gods, but her eyes and heart were still centered on the Lord, Jehovah. He had not forgotten her. She was His child.

God never tells us how He is going to sustain us and care for us; He only tells us that He will sustain us, in good times and in the worst of times. His method is usually a complete mystery to us and the answer, a wonderful surprise!

IN-LAWS BECOME FRIENDS

As we go through life, each of us has been given the ability to either make friends or enemies of the people God has placed closest to us. Without a doubt, God had given Naomi the godly disposition to embrace and hold dear to her heart her daughters-in-law. True love requires nourishment. And Naomi had spent some years nourishing the bond between herself and her daughters-in-law with godly familial love.

As we study Ruth, we will become aware of an extraordinary account of "True Love." Love that surmounts difficulties. Love that survives when encountered by tragedy. Love that we, in and of ourselves, are incapable of producing. God is Love and all true love must have its origin in Him.

God had given Naomi His insight into true love and then stood alongside her as she radiated His love into the hearts of her two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth.

It is God's spirit that is on display as we look at the love bond that existed between Naomi, Orpah and Ruth. They had all endured the tragedy of losing their husbands. Such tragedies, while the same in the natural sense, can never be identical losses. Great love translates into great loss. But if the love bond has been strained by infidelity, abuse or even being unequally yoked, the loss, at times, is almost welcomed. Each person handles their loss differently.

God has called us to stand alongside of widows, no matter how we may personally view their loss. James, Jesus' brother, clearly tells us, "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after...widows in their distress..." (James 1:27)

CONCLUSION

The Lord has clearly portrayed one of the first “grief support groups” as we begin the study of Ruth. Interestingly, the Bible is silent as to the degree of the three women’s losses. They each had suffered. They each had turned to one another for help as they endured their pain and sorrow. God Himself tells us to “bear one another’s burdens.” (Galatians 6:2) That is what Naomi, Orpah and Ruth were doing.

Whenever mutual burdens are borne with the Lord’s guidance, care and compassion, be sure that a strong bond will be formed between those individuals bearing each other’s burdens. This is the bond Naomi, Ruth and Orpah shared.

APPENDAGE – NAOMI

Lord, there it was – Death –
 Staring me in the face.
 First, my husband –
 Then my two sons.
 My “why” is still echoing
 Unanswered.
 The wrench of my heart has torn me apart.
 Strong faith?
 Seemingly shattered.
 But with You Lord
 The tornness
 The wrenching
 The pain
 – Subsides –
 As
 I look into Your Word and
 Hear You say,
 “I’m in control,
 Especially now.”
 You’ve never failed, Lord.
 You never will.
 So,
 I can rest,
 Knowing I’m in Your arms.
 “Almighty, Never Failing,”
 Controlling my future.
 Bringing Your goodness to bear
 Even on this –
 My heart’s complaint.
 You are my Lord
 And I yield
 To Your will.

APPENDAGE – RUTH

As I look at my mother-in-law
 I feel her pain.
 Yes, I’ve had a loss
 But she has lost three.
 Just one hurts so much
 I don’t understand
 How she’s able to stand
 And keep running her race.
 She’s told me her secret
 And I’ve listened to her.
 It’s her God that’s at work
 Bringing peace to her heart.
 I long to have peace
 Like Naomi has.
 My troubled heart keeps
 Crying for You.
 Naomi’s God must
 Become my God.
 Until He is mine
 I’ll be empty inside.
 Lord, thank you for giving me
 This Mother-in-law
 Who has shown me so clear
 That her God is near.
 He’s the God that can see me
 Through difficult times.
 It’s His love I’ve seen
 Lifting Naomi – so sad –
 To have joy once again.
 I, too, want that joy.
 So Lord, I am Yours.
 I’ll be all that You want.
 I’m yielded, I’m ready.
 Use all of me, Lord.

PERSONAL APPLICATION – RUTH 1:6-22

Heavenly Father, remind us that You have said, “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.” (Psalms 116:15) Therefore we will look forward to seeing Elimelech, Mahlon, Kilion and _____ in heaven. Thank you for paying the price of their and our salvation with Your Son’s blood. Amen.

Ruth 1:6-10

1. What news reached Naomi and how did she react to this news?

2. Who was credited for bringing an end to the famine?

3. God bountifully provides daily food for us. Share with your group how you thank Him for His daily provisions.

4. When Naomi heard that the famine had ended in Judah, what plans did she make?

5. Who went with Naomi? Why do you think they accompanied Naomi?

6. Three women began the journey to Naomi’s homeland. What reason did Naomi give for sending her two daughters-in-law back to Moab?

7. How did they react to what Naomi said to them?

8. Many false gods were worshiped in Moab. Which false god was most attributed to them? (2 Kings 23:13) State what you know about this false god.

9. What law existed in Israel? Would this law apply to Naomi? (Deuteronomy 25:5 & 6)

10. Describe in your own words the bond that existed between Naomi and her two daughters-in-law. Is this typical of mother-in-law, daughter-in-law relationships? Explain.

11. Naomi blessed each of her daughters-in-law. State the double blessing given to Orpah and Ruth.

12. How did Naomi demonstrate affection to Orpah and Ruth?

13. What commitment did each daughter-in-law state at this point?

Ruth 1:11-18

14. What additional reasons did Naomi give both Orpah and Ruth for staying in their homeland of Moab?

15. Do you think Orpah made a wise choice? Give reasons for your answer.

16. Ruth's choice was not the same. Make a list of the commitments she made to Naomi. Which of her commitments is the most important? Why? (Hebrews 11:6; Acts 4:12; Psalms 62:1-2; Psalms 27:1)

Ruth 1:19-22

17. When Ruth and Naomi reached Bethlehem, describe the reaction of the townspeople.

18. How did Naomi respond to their reaction?

19. Who did Naomi blame for her trials? Is her statement true? (Job 1:6-12)

20. Share a time of difficulty you have gone through. Who did you turn to for help? (Psalms 46:1; Psalms 27:5; Psalms 9:9-10)

21. What bit of good news did Ruth and Naomi receive?



NAOMI AND RUTH ARRIVE IN BETHLEHEM – RUTH 1:19-22

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CONCLUSION

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PERSONAL APPLICATION – RUTH 2:1-23

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“Naomi’s prayer was likely; ‘Lord I’m at the end of all my hope and strength.’ But God’s answer was, ‘Child, you’re just at the beginning of Mine.’”

GOOD NEWS ARRIVES FROM JUDAH – RUTH 1:6-18

The famine had ended in Bethlehem so Naomi made the decision to return to her homeland. Years had passed and the three women, Naomi, Orpah and Ruth, had endured mutual losses. They had each lost their husband, and Naomi had also lost her two sons, Mahlon and Kilion. During these difficult years, a bond was formed. Their desire to remain together, grieve together and support one another became their way of life. So Naomi, Orpah and Ruth set out on the journey to Bethlehem together.

It was Naomi’s unselfish, loving heart that prompted her to tell her daughters-in-law to turn back and make a new life for themselves in Moab, which was their home.

Naomi’s suggestion that they return to their “mother’s” home rather than stay with her, their “mother-in-law,” would likely be met with applause in many “in-law” relationships. Their desire to remain with Naomi speaks volumes about the pleasant, godly person Naomi had been in their lives.

Orpah listened to Naomi’s suggestion and agreed that it was the sensible thing to do. She could start over, remarry and raise her own family in Moab.

But not Ruth! Ruth had a deeper bond with Naomi than Orpah. Ruth’s bond was based on a mutual acknowledgment and love for Naomi’s God, Jehovah. Centuries later Jesus would commend one sister’s action as “the better part” when visiting Mary and Martha’s home. (Luke 10:42) Ruth chose “the better part” and we will see Jesus’ “promise.” “It will not be taken away from her” was fulfilled in Ruth’s life, just as it was in Mary’s life.

Ruth’s unrivaled confession of faith has stood for centuries reminding us that when God is at work in a person’s life, beautiful changes occur. He accomplishes changes that we are incapable of producing on our own — changes that bring blessings to us now and throughout eternity in the presence of our Kinsman-Redeemer.

While she was stating her hopelessness, God was already starting to act. He does the same in our lives.

Ruth's confession of faith rings out in churches across the world as a great confession of faith and commitment. It remains one of the most used wedding texts, although it was not spoken in that context.

† I will go with you.

† I will live with you.

† I want your people to also be my people.

† I want your God to be my God.

† Death will not separate us

† I will die and be buried where you die and are buried.

John R. Wilch tells us, "Those believers who share the same burial ground profess their union of faith in the same God. For believers to be buried in community also implies their reunion after death into everlasting life through the Lord."

NAOMI AND RUTH ARRIVE IN BETHLEHEM – RUTH 1:19-22

The last ten years and the three deaths that Naomi had endured apparently had taken quite a toll on her. Naomi's appearance was so changed that she was barely recognizable. God had allowed great suffering to alter her appearance. Her very faith had been challenged and was again being challenged as she entered her hometown of Bethlehem.

Naomi ("pleasant") now asked to be called Mara ("bitter"). Her reason — the Almighty has made my life bitter. He has afflicted me. He has brought me back to my home in Bethlehem empty.

There are stages of grief. The first stage, "denial," had been met by Naomi and Ruth and was now part of their past. They no longer denied the deaths of their husbands and Naomi's two sons. They likely had prepared their dead bodies for burial which helped serve as closure to "denial." Another stage of grief is "anger" and likely that is where

Naomi was in her grieving process as she entered her hometown of Bethlehem. Anger needs to be expressed and dealt with so healing may proceed. Naomi was now able to voice her anger in her familiar surroundings. Knowing that she was among fellow believers and fellow kinsmen made that possible. She felt secure enough to vent her personal heartache, tragedy and anger.

Naomi, who was barely recognizable by her close friends and neighbors, was being tenderly watched over by her heavenly Father. He is the One who had placed His call — to remain with Naomi — in Ruth's heart. The two widows were being cared for by the Lord Who has promised to "defend the cause of the...widow and who loves the alien, giving them food and clothing." (Deuteronomy 10:18) Two widows, one of them also an alien, were about to test another promise that Jehovah had made.

God's promise was about to be met with God's timing. The barley harvest was just beginning!

CONCLUSION

Since Naomi's husband, Elimelech, and her two sons, Mahlon and Kilion, were dead and she had no grandchildren, returning to Bethlehem was the logical move for her. She was going home. There she would have friends who could share her grief. But the thought of having a grandchild seemed out of reach. Yes, Ruth was with her, but Ruth had been barren when married to her son, Mahlon. Naomi felt trapped by her circumstances. She was depressed.

But that was not how God saw her hapless state. While she was stating her hopelessness, God was already starting to act. He does the same in our lives. Naomi's prayer was likely; "Lord I'm at the end of all my hope and strength." But God's answer was, "Child, you're just at the beginning of Mine."