

NAOMI - RUTH CONNECTION

LESSON SIX: RUTH 1:3

By Sandy Harber

"And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons."

The Bible does not tell us how long Naomi's family was in Moab when her husband died. She was left with two sons, ages unknown. The sons were old enough to marry at some point during the ten-year sojourn in Moab, so they may have been teens or pre-teens when they left Bethlehem.

The sons were not robust lads. Malhon means "the sickly one" and Chilion means "the pining one." The boys' unhealthy state may account for why the family left Bethlehem seemingly on their own. Perhaps they feared the famine would be especially hard on the frail constitution of their sons. It may also explain why they remained in Moab so long. They had no way of knowing what conditions they would face when they returned to Israel. The 50-mile journey may have been too arduous for them. Perhaps Elimelech and Naomi were just trying to be good parents.

The little family of three needed some way to provide food and shelter for themselves without Elimelech. We can only speculate since the Bible is silent on these details. Perhaps they had a small farm. Perhaps Naomi did sewing for the neighbors. Perhaps the sons worked on a neighboring farm, or as apprentices in some skilled work.

Losing the head of the family is hard on so many levels. It isn't just the emotional pain of realizing you will never see or speak with your husband/father again in your lifetime. The household dynamics change. Financial issues must be ironed out. Life changing decisions must be made. And all this upheaval occurs when you are at your lowest point, weak, and vulnerable. This is when God picks you up and carries you through, as the poem "Footprints" (or "Footprints in the Sand") explains. As someone observed, when God takes us through suffering, on the other side is strength.

Life is a constant series of changes. But our God is immutable (unchanging). He always loves us. He's always present with us. He knows what we need before we ask and provides it. He comforts our grief, listens patiently to our rants, guides us down the right path, and corrects our errors. God never leaves us on our own. He never fails us.

God was there for Naomi, Mahlon, and Chilion, too. He filled the role of Protector and Provider. In the Law God gave to Moses, He provided for the widows and fatherless by instructing Israeli farmers to leave some grain, olives, and grapes for the poor to glean (Deut. 24:19-22).

But Naomi's family wasn't in Israel. They were in Moab where no such laws existed. Nevertheless, you can be assured God met their needs. As the Psalmist reminds us, "The Lord ... relieveth the fatherless and the widow...." (Ps. 146:9). God cares for His children.

"I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusted in him." Psalm 34:4, 8