

NAOMI - RUTH CONNECTION

LESSON TWENTY-FOUR: RUTH 1:21b

"Why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?"

Naomi asks the people, "why do you call me 'pleasant' considering God has borne witness against me and broken me into pieces?" Five times in chapter one Naomi points out her belief that God is against her. Not once does she defend herself or indicate that God is unfair in His dealing with her.

First, Naomi told her daughters-in-law that God was against her (v. 13). And that, she implied, was the reason Ruth and Orpah were widows. In effect, Mahlon and Chilion died because God was against Naomi. She offered no proof that this was the reason her sons died. She gave no explanation of why God was so angry with her. She does, however, assume guilt for their demise. Basically, Naomi is saying, "My sons are dead because God is mad at me. It's all my fault."

The other four complaints against God are made in the presence of the people of Bethlehem who greeted Naomi upon her arrival into town. Complaint one: "God has dealt very bitterly with me." (v. 20). Things had not gone well for Naomi in Moab. She attributed this to God, Who was acting against her for reasons unknown (at least to us).

Complaint two: "Yes, God brought me back home, but I have nothing to show for the last 10 years. I came out of Moab empty-handed." (v.20). At least she does give God credit for bringing her back home safely. But she has nothing of value to show for the last 10 years of her life. Worse, she was better off 10 years ago before she went to Moab.

Complaint three: "God has testified against me." (v. 21). Perhaps this is more of a confession than a complaint. God has taken the stand and borne witness against her. The nature of her crime is not stated. Fleeing to Moab without consulting God perhaps? Not trusting Him to take care of them during the famine? Settling into a society that worshipped idols?

Complaint four: "The all-powerful God has broken me into pieces." (v. 21). The Hebrew word translated "afflicted" means "to spoil (literally, by breaking in pieces); do harm; do mischief; punish." Naomi has been completely shattered by her experiences in Moab.

Naomi acknowledges God is in control of everything that has happened. But she never accuses Him of acting unjustly. She does seem to assume the guilt for her loss. "God has testified against me." Therefore, she did something to warrant the punishment (in her mind).

Feeling guilty when a loved one dies is a normal reaction. If I had done this or that could I have saved them? What if I had made a different decision? What if I had acted sooner? Did I do everything I could or should have?

Taking on a burden like this will weigh us down. It can only cause unnecessary pain. Before healing can begin we need to release ourselves from the guilt we feel because we survived and they didn't.

Remember your loved one is in a better place. They are at rest. They are at peace. Forgive yourself for surviving. Recognize that you are not in control. Your actions or inaction did not affect the outcome. It's not your fault.

*"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."
Philippians 4:8*