

# Introduction to the Book of Ruth

The book of Ruth is really simple to outline. Each chapter deals with Ruth! That not only sounds simple; it might even sound trite. But it does make for a good outline. Just look for what Ruth did in each of the chapters, and you will have the subject of the chapter. Overall, the major underlying theme of the book of Ruth is the kinsman redeemer. That will become clear as we move through the book, especially as we get to the last chapter. The kinsman redeemer is the overriding or overarching theme of this book.

The book of Ruth is one of two books in the Old Testament that bears the name of a woman. Have you ever wondered what God thinks about women? Have you ever wondered if God looks down on women? The fact that two books in the Scriptures are named after women should communicate something to us of God's view of women. He has a high view of women. Ruth is one of the books. Esther is the other book. Both are in the Old Testament.

It was not until the New Testament that Paul seemed to teach a new concept of God's view of women, but in truth God's view of women had not changed and Paul's teaching did not differ from the truths in the Old Testament! People today hold different views about Paul's attitude toward women. Some believe he had a demeaning attitude toward women, and some say he had a positive attitude. Early on God made known His view in the Old

Testament. We do not need to debate Paul's teaching on the subject.

The book of Ruth is about a young Gentile woman. She was a Moabitess from the land of Moab. She came out of paganism and apparently was worshiping Baal because the Moabites worshiped Baal. Her mother-in-law was a Jewess named Naomi whose husband had died and also both of her sons. When Ruth's husband, one of Naomi's sons, died, Ruth decided to go with her mother-in-law back to Naomi's home in Bethlehem.

Then the story starts to really unfold as we get into chapter two of the book of Ruth. Eventually, Ruth finds a redeemer, a lover, and the story becomes wonderful. At the end of the book, in Ruth 4, we find a "nugget", a small piece of gold. Some people have believe that nugget is the purpose or reason why Ruth was written. I do not think so. I think Ruth was written because there are lots of principles that we can gather from this book. I believe it also teaches how God honored the woman, Ruth.

When we get to chapter 4, we find that Ruth will become



Ruth and Boaz In the Field

the great-grandmother of King David and eventually an ancestor of Christ. She shows up in the lineage of Jesus in Matthew 1. It is really incredible to discover that. If it was not for the book of Ruth, you would not actually see that genealogical connection. Now that is important. You will not find that elsewhere. You find that only

in the book of Ruth. So this story is fascinating, and the applications are very meaningful.

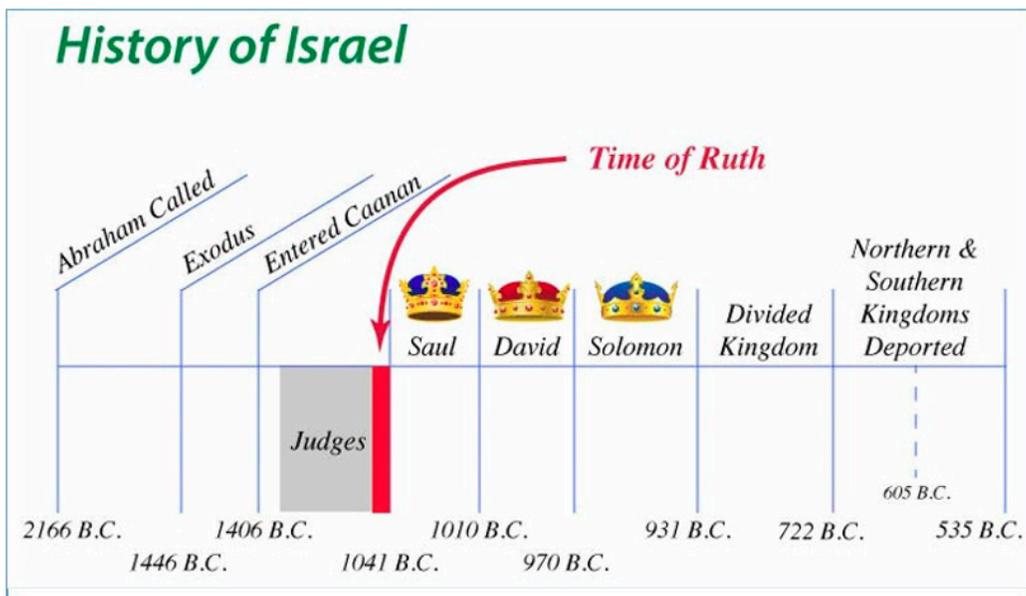
**Who Wrote the Book of Ruth?** I want to highlight a couple of points as we get into this study. First of all, we cannot determine the author of the book by reading it. You will not find any statement which names the author. In Paul's epistles, usually by reading the very first verse, we know that Paul wrote the book. In some of Paul's epistles, he repeats the fact that he is the author. But in the book of Ruth, there is no indication of the author's identity. So there has been much conjecture as to the author. Jewish tradition says it was the prophet Samuel, but we do

the land of Moab with his wife and his two sons.  
Ruth 1:1 (NASB)

There is a lot of information buried in this verse. One of the very first things we are told is "it came about in the days when the judges governed."

When did the judges govern? Following is a chart that shows you first the call of Abraham, then the years of the Exodus, and when the Israelites entered Caanan. Shortly thereafter, the judges began to rule.

Look at Judges 2:16-18



not know that for sure. It could be Samuel because Samuel would fit with the timeline because the events of Ruth occurred during the time of the judges. That timing could bleed over into the time of Samuel the prophet, so he could have written the book. We do not have positive proof, but that is Jewish tradition.

**When Was Ruth Written.** Other questions to be considered are when and why the book of Ruth was written. So let us begin with Ruth 1:1, which says,

Now it came about in the days when the judges governed, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in

Then the LORD raised up judges who delivered them from the hands of those who plundered them. Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they played the harlot after other gods and bowed themselves down to them. They turned aside quickly from the way in which their fathers had walked in obeying the commandments of the LORD; they did not do as their fathers. When the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge and delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed and afflicted them. Judges 2:16-18 (NASB)

What Judges 2 says is that God raised up some men (and one woman), to lead and rule. They were described as judges. We are familiar with some of them, such as Gideon and Samson. The time of the judges was roughly 1370 to 1041 B.C. It is important to notice on the chart that after the judges Saul became king and was followed by David as king.

Ruth 4:16-22 says,

Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her lap, and became his nurse. The neighbor women gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi!" So they named him Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David. Now these are the generations of Perez: to Perez was born Hezron, and to Hezron was born Ram, and to Ram, Amminadab, and to Amminadab was born Nahshon, and to Nahshon, Salmon, and to Salmon was born Boaz, and to Boaz, Obed, and to Obed was born Jesse, and to Jesse, David. Ruth 4:16-22 (NASB)

There is King David's lineage. Now the only way the writer knew to put King David in this lineage was that King David had already been born when the book was written.

That tells us roughly when the book was written. But what we are told in verse 1 is that the events occurred during the time of the judges. Between the judges and David was a period of between fifty and eighty years depending upon when during David's life the book was written. It was written during the life of David, but the events took place in the times of the judges.

We know that the events in Ruth did not occur when the judges first began ruling because that was hundreds of years earlier. Therefore, the events in Ruth had to occur at the end of the times of the judges. Thus, it would seem that the book was written during the time of King David. That gives you an idea as to when the events of Ruth occurred and when the book was written.

**The Famine in the Book of Ruth.** Verse 1 reads,

Now it came about in the days when the judges governed, that there was a famine in the land. Ruth 1:1 (NASB)

We are told now that a famine has taken place. Famines were not unusual in the Old Testament. If you search for just the word, "famine," you would find that it is scattered throughout the Old Testament as there were thirteen major famines recorded in the Old Testament.

Genesis 12 records a famine which caused Abraham to go down to Egypt. We are told he got into trouble when he told the king that his wife was not really his wife but was his sister. His statement was half true. Abraham was deceptive. Abraham deceived the king, but God chose to rescue Abraham's wife, but not to the credit of Abraham.

The next major famine is recorded in Genesis 26. Joseph was down in Egypt where he had made advance plans to feed people during the famine. God raised Joseph up to provide for large populations of that day. So Jacob sent some of his sons to Egypt to purchase and return with food. Eventually, Jacob and his family ended up living in Egypt. That is the second famine that occurred in the pages of Scripture.

Now in the book of Ruth, we read of another famine. Every time we see a famine occur, it is always the result of judgment—every time. It makes me wonder about our own country. There are some parts of our country that have experienced famine. There are some parts of our country that experience a lot of drought. It is interesting where it occurs. But our point is that famine has frequently been a sign of God's judgment.

The account reads that a certain man of "Bethlehem in Judah." The word "in" is not in the Hebrew text. The Hebrew reads as "Bethlehem Judah." Usually when we think of Bethlehem, we think of the town that is 6 miles south of Jerusalem. There were at least two Bethlehems. One was in the region of Galilee, and then there is the Bethlehem down near Jerusalem. The writer of Ruth said this is Bethlehem Judah to make sure that we know which Bethlehem.

There was a man in Bethlehem Judah and he:

... went to sojourn in the land of Moab . . . Ruth 1:1 (NASB)

This man went to sojourn in Moab. The word "sojourn"

is important. It is probably the best English word to communicate the meaning of the Hebrew word. That is, he is a resident alien who is not planning to take up citizenship. He is only there temporarily and plans to eventually leave.

So a man from Bethlehem went to Moab and planned to only stay temporarily. How often have you and I done something we thought was only going to be for a temporary period of time? Have you ever bought something, maybe a magazine subscription and thought, “I will just try it for a little while?” But before you know it, you have been paying for it for years. Has that ever happened to you?

Or maybe you moved to a different city and thought you were only moving there for a little while, and now you have been there for what seems like forever! We often think something is going to be temporary but overtime becomes a way of life. That is what we are being told here in this verse—that he planned to go to Moab just a little while. Why? Because there was a famine. So, he would go to Moab where there was food, save the family, have something to eat, the family can live, and then they can return. He took his wife and his two sons.

**Location of Moab.** Moab was on the east side of the Dead Sea and was a fairly large area. That meant that he had to go up over, or go down under the Dead Sea. More than likely, he went up over the Dead Sea, across the Jordan River, and then down on the east side to get to Moab, depending on to which part of Moab he wanted to go.

Moab was not a great place to be. Following are a couple of pictures, just to give you an idea of what Moab looks like. Today it is a desert, a wilderness that is fairly barren. This is the Arnon Valley along the northern border of ancient Moab.

**Origins of the Moabites.** Now Moab has a bad history. I do not To understand the origins of the Moabites, go to Genesis 19. They do not have a glorious history. We will start with Genesis 19:30. This is after Sodom and Gomorrah have been destroyed. Lot and his wife have escaped, and Lot’s wife turned into a pillar of salt because she looked back. Verses 30 to 35 say:

Lot went up from Zoar, and stayed in the mountains,



Map of Moab, Reuben, and Ammon

and his two daughters with him; for he was afraid to stay in Zoar; and he stayed in a cave, he and his two daughters. Then the firstborn said to the younger, “Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come in to us after the manner of the earth. “Come, let us make our father drink wine, and let us lie with him that we may preserve our family through our father.” So they made their father drink wine that night, and the firstborn went in and lay with her father; and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. On the following day, the firstborn said to the younger, “Behold, I lay last night with my father; let us make him drink wine tonight also; then you go in and lie with him, that we may preserve our family through

our father.” So they made their father drink wine that night also, and the younger arose and lay with him; and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. Genesis 19:30-35 (NASB)

What a disgrace! What a shameful act on their part! Lot obviously did not know what he was doing. Verse 36 says,

Thus both the daughters of Lot were with child by their father. Genesis 19:36 (NASB)

Now watch verse 37,

The firstborn bore a son, and called his name Moab; . . . Genesis 19:37 (NASB)

There is the origin of the Moabites, and

. . . he is the father of the Moabites to this day. Genesis 19:37 (NASB)

That is the origin of the Moabites and it was not a great beginning – not a great origin. What happened? There was conflict that followed; conflict between the Jews and the Moabites.

In Numbers 25 is an event that took place between Balaam and Balak. What we found in chapter 25 was a tug of war with the Moabites wanting to curse Israel, and what happened. We are told,

While Israel remained at Shittim, the people began to play the harlot with the

daughters of Moab. For they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel joined themselves to Baal of Peor. . . Numbers 25:1-3a (NASB)

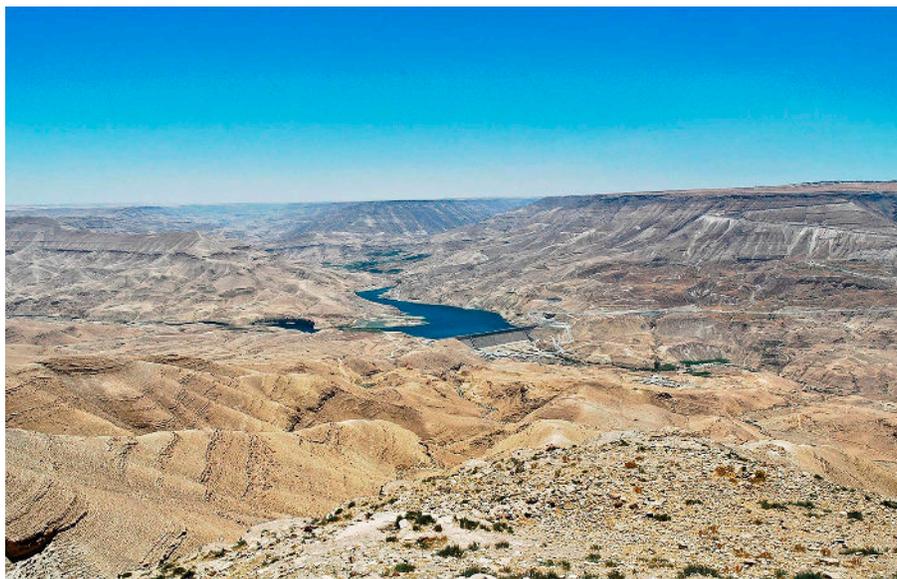
Now, Baal of Peor was the Moabite idol, the false god.

. . . and the LORD was angry against Israel. The LORD said to Moses, “Take all the leaders of the people and execute them in broad daylight before the LORD, so that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel.” So Moses said to the judges of Israel, . . . Numbers 25:3b-5a (NASB)

Now these judges are not to be confused with the judges in the book of Judges. These were judges whom Moses had appointed, and who made decisions on behalf of Israel.

. . . “Each of you slay his men who have joined themselves to Baal of Peor.” Numbers 25:5b (NASB)

This is what the Moabites did to the Israelites. Now this man (Elimelech) took his family and moved to Moab! Why would you move your family there?! What the Moabites tried to do was to bring a curse on the nation of Israel. Consider their origins!



Arnon Valley Southeast From Aroer

Psalm 108:9 tells us that God said Moab is a “washbowl”. That is a derogatory term! So why take your family to Moab? It is a godless place! Look what they tried to do. Elimelech had a problem. When famine comes, one has to have food, so Elimelech took

his family and moved them to Moab. What a bad decision! But that is similar to decisions that many make today.

We start rationalizing, “Oh well, we have to live. We have to do this, and we have to do that. The Lord really will not mind.” The Lord had told the Israelites that with regard to the inhabitants of the land of Palestine, they were not to intermingle with them. They were not to intermarry with them. They were supposed to kill everyone in the land when they first entered in because God was concerned that the Moabites and others would pull their hearts away from Him. So what was Elimelech doing, moving his family to Moab?!

Elimelech did not follow what we would say are biblical principles. There is a key principle here. He did not follow a fundamental principle. He moved his family someplace he should not have moved them. God told them that they were not supposed to intermingle.

We read in Joshua that they did not kill everyone in the land. That was a problem for which they eventually paid. We as Christians today do always do as God has told us to do. Sometimes we just do not stop to think about it. Sometimes it is not that we are really willful. We just forget what He has said. We all on occasions have issues come up in the church, in the home, or with individuals. We wonder, “What should I really do? If I do this, this might happen, or that might happen.” Then the thing you conclude is you should follow the applicable biblical principle and let the results rest with God. You have to do what is right. If we follow God’s principles, then we know that we are in sync with Him.

Blessing comes when we follow what He asks us to do. Then if something bad happens along the way, at least we know we have done what God wanted us to do. That is what is important. What Elimelech did was to move his family to Moab against biblical principles.

**Elimelech, Naomi, and Their Sons.** Verse 2 says,

**The name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife, Naomi; and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah. Ruth 1:2a (NASB)**



Bedouin at Balu

Actually, as we pointed out earlier, it would be Bethlehem Judah.

**... Now they entered the land of Moab and remained there. Ruth 1:2b (NASB)**

The name Elimelech means “my God is king.”

What a great name! I do not know what your name means. My name means “God is gracious.” All of our names mean something, and Elimelech means “God is king.” You would think that he would be following his king, his God. But he did not do that, he erred greatly and took his family to Moab.

Naomi means “pleasant”. That is a beautiful name for a woman. Mahlon, the son, means “sick”. Now that probably is an indication of why he ended up dying. Maybe he was persistently ill. Chilion, the other son, means “puny.” That may also give some hint as to why he ended up dying. That is the family of Elimelech!

We are told that they were Ephrathites. That means “of

Bethlehem.” Genesis 35:19 tells us that Bethlehem was also called Ephrath. Micah 5:2 also mentions Bethlehem Ephrathah. So when we are told here that they were Ephrathites of Bethlehem, that just confirms the people who were in Bethlehem were known as Ephrathites. Now we are told they went into the land of Moab.

**The Death of Elimelech.** Then verse 3 says,

Then Elimelech, Naomi’s husband, died; and she was left with her two sons. Ruth 1:3 (NASB)

Then a sad event occurred. Elimelech died and Naomi was left by herself. That was a real tragedy. You can only imagine the anguish that Naomi experienced.

**The Tragedy of Marrying Moabite Wives.**

Verse 4 reads,

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. Ruth 1:4 (NASB)

“They” refers to the two sons. Most commentators believe that the ten years is referring to the total time that they were in Moab. Is that just a short period of time? Were they there just a short period of time? No! Ten years is not a short time. They went there because of a famine. But they were there for about ten years. The name Orpah means “stubborn,” and Ruth means “friendship.” Those were the names of the two sons’ wives. But the sad part in this verse is what the sons did. They married Moabite



Fields South of Arnon

women.

Ezra 9 gives us an understanding as to why these marriages were a bad idea. Ezra 9:1 says,

Now when these things had been completed, the princes approached me, saying, “The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, according to their abominations, those of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites. . . Ezra 9:1a (NASB)

Did you see that? The Moabites.

. . . the Egyptians and the Amorites. For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has intermingled with the peoples of the lands; indeed, the hands of the princes and the rulers have been foremost in this unfaithfulness.” Ezra 9:1b-2 (NASB)

Is that not an indictment? They intermingled and intermarried. So did these two Jewish sons. Remember what Elimelech did was to take his wife and his two sons with him from Bethlehem and brought them to Moab. They then

married Moabite women which they were not supposed to do. This is the sad result of not following a biblical principle.

Elimelech did not do what he should have done. He should not have moved to Moab. If he had not moved to Moab, would his sons have married

Moabite women? The answer is probably no. Sad result. It is an important message for parents if you have children still at home. The important principle is that if you follow biblical principles, then your children will probably follow biblical principles. At least there is a greater probability that they will follow biblical principles. If your children see that you do not follow biblical principles, you set the example for them that it is not necessary to follow biblical principles.

The same is true for grandparents. If you are a grandparent and you have grandchildren in the home, we need to be examples to our children and to our children's children. Being examples of what God wants us to be—that is, we follow biblical principles—that affects our children and our grandchildren. See what then happens here as the sons married Moabite women.

**The Death of Elimelech's Sons.** Verse 5 says,

*Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died, and the woman was bereft of her two children and her husband. Ruth 1:5 (NASB)*

The “woman” is Naomi. All of a sudden, Naomi has lost her whole family. With whom is she left? She is left with two daughters-in-law who are Moabite women from a pagan background. We will discover as we read further into the chapter how all this works out.

**Trust The Lord to Meet Your Needs.** I want to close this lesson with an application and a principle. That is Elimelech should not have left Bethlehem to go to Moab. There is another reason why he should not have gone to Moab. He should have trusted the Lord to meet his needs and obeyed God's laws.

Yes, there was a famine in Bethlehem. Do you then just pick up your whole family and move someplace where you are not supposed to move, and associate with people with whom you are not supposed to associate? God had told them to not associate with the Moabites in addition other nations of peoples in the land of Palestine. What do you do when circumstances have you up against a solid biblical command to not do something? You can choose to go either way.

What do you do? What should Elimelech have done?

What Elimelech should have done was to have stayed in Bethlehem and trusted the Lord to meet his needs. Maybe what he should have done was leave his family there and periodically make a trip over to Moab to buy food and bring it back. That would at least have been more consistent with God's command, as opposed to moving his whole family where he should not have moved. Then his sons would not have married Moabite women! Yet in God's great design, Ruth was placed in the lineage from David all the way down to Christ. Ruth the Moabitess was placed into the genealogy of Christ!

Turn to Matthew 6. Let me lay out the applicable biblical principles. Matthew 6:30-33 is a passage that deals with our provision. I am going to start with verse 30. It says,

*But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! Matthew 6:30 (NASB)*

Do you see what the problem is? The problem is our little faith. Jesus makes it very clear—our problem is little faith. Jesus said, “You of little faith!” If you trusts Him to provide, then you have little faith.

Verse 31 says,

*Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; . . . Matthew 6:31-32a (NASB)*

That is, the unbelievers worry about the same things. You see that on TV all the time. People are always wondering what they are going to eat or drink or wear. He said,

*. . . for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. Matthew 6:32 (NASB)*

The message is, do you not know that your heavenly Father already knows what you need? The implication is He knows your need and will provide! Verse 33 says,

“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Matthew 6:33 (NASB)

Sometimes we misunderstand this verse. What we often do when we read this verse, and what I often did in my younger years when I read this verse was to read only, “But seek ye first His kingdom.” I would stop there. My whole focus was doing what God wanted. That is part of the verse. But we miss the last piece, “and His righteousness.” That implies that you are to be holy or godly.

Then we are told, “and all these things will be provided.” Does that mean I am going to be able to ride around in a Rolls Royce and have a mansion? Is that what Jesus is talking about? No! He is talking about meeting our needs. That is a principle.

Do you think Elimelech maybe had little faith? It is possible that he had little faith. What we know is that he should have stayed in Bethlehem and done something else to provide for his family. He should not have moved the family to Moab.

**Honor the Lord.** Proverbs 3:9-10 tells us what God will do if we put Him first in our life. He will make sure our barns are full and running over. He will provide for us. It says,

Honor the LORD from your wealth  
And from the first of all your produce;  
So your barns will be filled with plenty  
And your vats will overflow with new wine. Proverbs 3:9-10 (NASB)

That is a promise from the Lord. Elimelech ignored the promise. This raises a very interesting principle. I want you to turn to Hosea 13:11. I want to repeat this principle because it fits.

It fits what we are talking about here in Ruth. In Hosea 13:11, God is and He says,

I gave you a king in My anger  
And took him away in My wrath.

Hosea 13:11 (NASB)

I do not know how your translation reads, but the meaning of the Hebrew has the idea that “I have been giving you kings in my anger, and I have been taking them away.” The idea is that God started giving kings, and along the way He kept taking them away. So He gives and He takes away—gives them and takes them away, gives them and takes them away. That is the idea. We know that early on Israel complained to the prophet Samuel that they wanted a king like all the other nations had. What did God do? God gave Israel a king.

In this verse God said, “I gave you a king in My anger.” That really was not what was best for Israel. Israel got their king but it was not the best thing for them. If you are thinking of Romans 8:28 that says “all things work together for good,” that is the big umbrella picture, but that does not necessarily mean that there might not be something in the middle that is not the best for you. That is the principle here in Hosea.

It is also repeated elsewhere. It was not in Elimelech’s best interest to go to Moab. But if Elimelech was a saint, then Romans 8:28 fits—

God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God. . . Romans 8:28 (NASB)

James 4:3 is an important principle to remember as well. Jesus even talked in the Gospels about how we can be like the nagging woman asking for bread. Eventually because of our nagging, we will get what we want. There are some people in our world who practice nagging. They just pound someone until they get what they want. James 4:3 says,

You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. James 4:3 (NASB)

There is a lot in this verse, but the part I want you to see is that you can ask and be given something. The Holy Spirit tells us we sometimes do not get what we ask because we ask

with the wrong motives. The implication is you could have received it if you had asked with the right motives.

There are some people who say that everything has already been decided and that prayer is just an exercise that is good for you. God has already decided everything. Our lives have already been mapped out, already been planned. All you have to do is just go through this exercise of prayer that is good for you. That is not what this verse teaches. This verse states that you do not receive because you do not ask with the right motives.

Sometimes we can ask and in response God does give us some things that are not in our best interests. For example, God gave Israel kings when they rejected the judges He had provided as their leaders. He told them they were going to get a king, and this is what he is going to do. He is going to do all these things to you that are not really the best for you. You will then come back later and complain.

God said, Do not come back and complain after I give them to you. I am not going to listen to you. The message is you can pound heaven's door until maybe God will give you what you want. It may not be the best thing for you, but in the big picture everything works out together for good. You are going to suffer, though, because you pounded heaven's door until you got what you wanted. That is an important principle to learn here. Elimelech is a good example. We do not know if he pounded heaven's door, but God let him do what he wanted, to go to Moab.

Remember Psalm 127:1 says,

Unless the LORD builds the house,  
They labor in vain who build it; . . . Palm 127:1  
(NASB)

That also goes with making a trip from Bethlehem to Moab. That is also true with anything and everything that you do today. We have a brother here who composes music. Some of you build things or are involved in ministries. You cannot do it unless the Lord is helping you. Just be aware of and follow these important biblical principles. Be more concerned with being biblical than getting what you first desire. Then you will have God's best blessings in your life.

Let us pray.