

SESSION 4: NAOMI

The women said to Naomi: “Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a kinsman redeemer.” Ruth 4:14

◀ Read Ruth Chapter 1. In verse 21, what question is Naomi asking, which many of us have asked as well?

◀ The word “suffering” could sometimes be used interchangeably with “affliction.” Look up “suffering” in a dictionary, and write down what it means. How is it different from affliction, and how is it the same?

◀ Read the entire Book of Ruth in one sitting (should take between 15-25 minutes).

◀ In Ruth 1:20, what did Naomi ask to be called? Why? What does this new name mean?

◀ Summarize the major events that follow Naomi’s statement in Ruth 1:21, all the way through the end of the book.

◀ Look up the word “bitter” in a dictionary. Is the dictionary definition any different from your own?

◀ The Hebrew word for “bitter” in Ruth 1:20-21 is mar. It means “to trickle, to be bitter, to be moved with choler (anger, wrath, irritation of the passions).” In contrast, the Hebrew name Naomi means “pleasant.” Much had happened to this Hebrew woman from Bethlehem. She left her homeland due to a famine, and endured the deaths of her husband and two sons while living in a foreign land. When word comes back that the famine is over in Israel, Naomi sets out for home, accompanied by one of her widowed daughters-in-law. Once home, Naomi announces that “the Almighty has made life very bitter for me.” Can’t you feel her anguish?

◀ Allow yourself for a moment (and only a moment) to feel the weight of Naomi’s emotions. What are some symptoms of bitterness?

◀ If you have personally experienced deep despair or bitterness, how would you describe it? Try to put into words what you were or are feeling.

◀ And yet, in the midst of Naomi’s bitterness, she refers to the LORD with a name we haven’t seen before in the book of Ruth. What does she call God? What insight does this give you into Naomi’s position before God? See Ruth 1:20.

◀ This name in the Hebrew is Shaddai, meaning “most powerful.” It refers to God’s strength and provision. One suggested root meaning of El Shaddai is “The Overpowerer,” meaning God will do what He purposes to do, overpowering all opposition.* In a very dark time of Naomi’s life, she refers to the God of strength and provision. Naomi to Mara, pleasant to bitter. Yet, El Shaddai intervenes. Notice that throughout the entire book, nobody calls Naomi “Mara” as she so passionately stated in Ruth 1. Re-read Ruth 4:13-17, note the blessings that Naomi is celebrating:

◀ Read Philippians 4:4. What are we instructed to do?

*Dawn Wilson, BibleStudyTools.com, “What is the Meaning of the Name El Shaddai?”

◀ Take some time to reflect upon your own times of bitterness and suffering. Meditate on the book of Ruth and Philippians 4. Allow God to lead you from Mara to El Shaddai. Take time to confess your raw emotions to Him—God can handle your emotions! Don’t rush this process. But as you come to a close in your time of confession, move on to rejoicing. Remember the list of El Shaddai’s provisions for Naomi, and write your own list of El Shaddai’s provisions for you. Naomi’s suffering did not happen overnight, nor did the reasons for celebration. What are things in your life you can honestly rejoice over and give thanks to God for, especially in this time of suffering?

◀ This is the most important time in the life of a Christian who is suffering—the ability to rejoice even though circumstances haven’t changed. Now, let’s go back to Psalm 119:65-72, and take a closer look at verse 67.

THE SEARCH

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