

Ruth 1:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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

Analysis

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

The terse statement "Elimelech Naomi's husband died" (vayamot Elimelek, וַיָּמֹת אֶלְימֶלֶךְ) receives no elaboration or explanation. The narrative's economy emphasizes the outcome rather than the process—the family patriarch who led them to Moab now leaves them as vulnerable foreigners in enemy territory. The Hebrew verb mut (מוֹת, "died") appears repeatedly in this chapter (vv. 3, 5), creating a funeral dirge atmosphere.

The phrase "she was left" (vatisha'er, וַיָּתָשֵׁאֶר) uses a verb meaning "to remain" or "be left behind," often with connotations of survival or remnant. Naomi becomes a remnant—left alone without her primary provider and protector in a foreign land. This verb appears frequently in contexts of divine judgment leaving only a remnant (Isaiah 1:9; 10:20-22), suggesting Naomi's survival despite loss connects to God's preserving purposes.

That she remains "with her two sons" provides temporary comfort but foreshadows further loss (v. 5). In ancient Near Eastern culture, a widow's security depended on adult sons who could provide for her and preserve the family line. Naomi still has two sons, suggesting hope for future stability. However, the narrative's foreboding tone, combined with the sons' ominous names ("sickly" and "failing"), hints that this security is temporary. The text invites theological reflection on whether

Elimelech's death in Moab represents divine judgment for leaving the Promised Land during famine.

Historical Context

Widowhood in ancient Near Eastern society represented extreme vulnerability. Without modern social safety nets, widows depended on extended family, particularly adult sons, for economic survival and social protection. Old Testament law repeatedly commands care for widows (Exodus 22:22; Deuteronomy 10:18; 24:17-21; 27:19), recognizing their precarious position. Prophetic literature uses widowhood as metaphor for desolation and abandonment (Isaiah 47:8-9; 54:4; Lamentations 1:1).

For Naomi, widowhood in Moab was doubly difficult—she lacked both her husband and her community. As a foreigner without extended family networks, she had no traditional support system. The Moabite community might not recognize obligations to care for foreign widows, leaving her entirely dependent on her sons. This vulnerability makes her sons' subsequent deaths even more catastrophic.

The text's silence on the cause of Elimelech's death invites interpretive caution. Some commentators see his death as divine judgment for leaving Israel, while others view it simply as tragic mortality. The Hebrew Bible frequently leaves such questions unanswered, focusing readers on God's sovereign purposes rather than mechanistic cause-and-effect explanations. What matters narratively is not why Elimelech died but how God works through the resulting circumstances.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. What human securities are you trusting that could vanish suddenly, and how can you cultivate deeper trust in God's unchanging faithfulness?
2. Have you experienced consequences from seeking relief through compromise rather than trusting God through difficulty?
3. How does God's pattern of working through remnants encourage you when faithful believers seem few?

Interlinear Text

וְשָׁבֵן וְשָׁבֵן יְהוָה מִתְּמִתָּה
died And Elimelech husband Naomi's and she was left and her two
H4191 H458 H376 H5281 H7604 H1931 H8147

בָּנִים:

sons

H1121

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 34:19 (Parallel theme): Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all.

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