

Ruth 1:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband.

Analysis

And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband.

This verse completes the trilogy of death that dominates Ruth 1:1-5. The stark statement "Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them" (vayamutu gam-sheneihem, וַיָּמָוּתוּ גַם־שְׁנֵיהֶם) uses the same verb *mut* (מוֹת) as verse 3, creating a rhythmic funeral litany. The emphatic "also" (*gam*) and "both of them" (*sheneihem*) stress the completeness of loss—not just one son but both, leaving no male heir.

The phrase "the woman was left" (*vatisha'er ha'ishah*, וַתֵּשָׂאֶר הָאִשָּׁה) echoes verse 3's description of Naomi being left, but now intensifies the loss. She's no longer "Naomi" (pleasant) but simply "the woman" (*ha'ishah*), stripped of the identity that husband and sons provided. The phrase "of her two sons and her husband" can be translated "bereaved of" or "without"—she's left without (Hebrew *mishnei*, מִשְׁנֵי) those who gave her security, identity, and hope.

The text provides no explanation for the sons' deaths—no disease, accident, or divine judgment is mentioned. This silence invites theological reflection. Some interpreters see the deaths as judgment for marrying Moabites or refusing to return to Judah. Others view them simply as tragic mortality highlighting life's fragility. What's narratively clear is that Naomi faces complete desolation, utterly dependent on God's provision with no visible human resource. This extremity sets the stage for divine intervention through Ruth's loyalty and Boaz's redemption.

Historical Context

For ancient Near Eastern women, total loss of husband and sons represented worst-case catastrophe. Without male protection and provision, widows faced poverty, vulnerability to exploitation, and social marginalization. That Naomi lost not only her husband but both sons (and apparently had no daughters-in-law bearing grandchildren) left her completely destitute. She had no legal claim on Moabite property, no family to provide for her, and no heir to carry on her deceased husband's name.

The irony of the situation is profound: Elimelech fled to Moab seeking life-sustaining food during famine, yet his entire male line perished there. The family that left Bethlehem ("house of bread") seeking bread in Moab found graves instead. This reversal demonstrates the futility of seeking deliverance apart from God's provision. Had they remained in Judah trusting God through famine, they might have survived; fleeing to enemy territory brought extinction of the male line.

Ancient Near Eastern law provided some protection for widows through levirate marriage customs, where a deceased man's brother would marry the widow to provide an heir (Deuteronomy 25:5-10). However, Naomi's situation was complicated—her sons died in Moab, far from extended family. Any kinsman-redeemer would be in Judah, unknown and inaccessible. Her only hope was returning home and hoping family there would exercise redemption rights.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. What human securities or sources of identity has God removed or might He be removing to reveal your complete dependence on Him?
2. How do you balance recognizing that disobedience brings consequences with avoiding the error of attributing every suffering to specific sin?
3. When stripped of roles and relationships that defined you, what remains as the foundation of your identity and worth?

Interlinear Text

וַיָּמָוּתוּ	גַּם	מִשְׁנֵי י	מַחֲלֹן	וְכִלְיֹן	וַתֵּשָׂאֶר
died	H1571	also both	And Mahlon	and Chilion	was left
H4191		H8147	H4248	H3630	H7604
<hr/>					
הָאִשָּׁה	וְהָאִשָּׁה	מִשְׁנֵי י	בְּנֵי יְהוָה	וְהָאִשָּׁה	
of them and the woman		also both	sons	and her husband	
H802		H8147	H3206	H376	

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org