

**Naomi –A Study of Hope**  
Widows of the Old Testament  
Teacher/Facilitator Study Guide  
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*Italics* indicate the text in the Student's Study Guide.

\*Indicates the author's study helps for the teacher/facilitator.

### **Review of Tamar**

*In the study of Tamar we learned of Tamar's loss of two husbands, the broken promise of marriage to Judah's third son, her plight of childlessness and her deceptive execution of a plan to conceive. Her actions almost cost her even her life itself. God in His mercy and forgiveness enabled Judah to relent from having her killed and to confess his own wrongdoing. Tamar and Judah, along with their twin sons Perez and Zerah are mentioned in the genealogy of King David and of Jesus Christ. God triumphed in Judah and Tamar's lives by bringing hope when they confessed the truth. During this review, please share how God is working in your life.*

- a. *In what way did Tamar's experience touch your life?*
- b. *What did you learn from the study of Tamar?*
- c. *Are you asking God to give you guidance and help, rather than resolving problems your own way?*
- d. *How have you seen God work in a special way to provide something you and your family need?*

\*This is a time for people in the study to share with others how God is working in their lives. Encourage the participants to support each other, to pray for one another and to rejoice together in answers and victories.

\*\*Pray before beginning the study. If you think someone in the group might like to open or close the study in prayer, it would be good to ask them ahead of time. That probably won't be necessary when they feel comfortable leading in prayer.

### **Prayer**

## Naomi – A Study of Hope

*There are fifteen Hebrew words in the Old Testament for the word hope. The one most frequently used has a literal meaning of a cord or attachment. Its figurative meaning is expectation of something longed for. The second most frequently used word has a primary root – to wait. It implies to be patient, to stay, to tarry. We will see how these apply as the study of Naomi progresses.*

1. *How do we know the book of Ruth was written after David was born? Because David is mentioned in Ruth 4:22.*

2. *Who wrote the book of Ruth? The author is unknown.*  
\*Some suggest that Samuel may have written it.

### **Read Ruth 1:1-22**

3. *According to Ruth 1:1 Naomi lived sometime when the Judges ruled Israel – 1373-1020 BC. What determined most people's behavior at that time (Judges 21:25)?*

There was no king. People did as they saw fit.

**Historical and Cultural Background:** *A brief study of Bible history is needful to understand the background and setting of Naomi's story. Naomi and her husband Elimelech were descendants of Judah, living in Bethlehem of Ephrathah.*

**Map:** Show a map of the Twelve Tribes in Canaan. Point out Judah, then Bethlehem.

The students should check to see what maps are at the back of their Bibles.

4. *Most of the people living in Bethlehem have descended from Judah's three sons (Numbers 26:20): Shelah, Perez and Zerah.*

5. *Judah's brother Joseph's story (Genesis chapter 37, 39-50) was passed down from generation to generation. He did not abandon his faith when he was owned as a slave, wrongly accused, and imprisoned. What does Acts 7:9-10 tell us about Joseph's relationship with God? God was with him; He rescued Joseph from all his troubles and gave him wisdom.*

**Discuss:** *God helped Joseph to forgive his brothers and invite them, with his father and all their families, to live in Egypt and escape the famine. How did Joseph's forgiveness affect Judah and his descendants for generations to come?*

\*Because Joseph forgave them, he provided for their well being. They survived the famine, grew in number and eventually, the brothers and their families became the Nation of Israel. Joseph's forgiveness enabled Judah to be set free from the guilt of his wrongdoings to Joseph. He and his descendants became leaders in their nation. David and Jesus Christ came through the line of Judah and his son Perez.

*What difference does forgiveness make in the lives of families today?*

\*Forgiveness makes the difference between a family staying together or separating and each going their own way. Unforgiveness causes bitterness which drives people apart. "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity" (Colossians 3:13-14).

**Map:** Show students a map of the Exodus. Locate Goshen, the area of Egypt where the Israelites settled.

6. *In 400 years the Hebrews, also known as Israelites, grew to be over 600,000 men with families. Who led them out of Egypt (the Exodus) to the promised land of Canaan (Acts 7:30-36)? Moses*

7. *Who wrote the first five books of the Bible? Moses*

\*The first five books of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy are the Books of the Law – also called The Pentateuch (pen-ta-tuk). As a literary unit, they provide the background for the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. These books are also known as the Books of Moses.

**Map:** On a map of the Exodus, locate Moab.

8. Near the end of forty years of wilderness wanderings, they traveled an ancient highway through Moab, east of the Dead Sea, called \_\_\_\_\_ (pg. 33). The King of Moab feared the many Israelites and hired \_\_\_\_\_ to curse them. In what way was Balaam's donkey unusual (pg. 34)? \_\_\_\_\_. Balaam could not curse Israel, instead, he blessed them. How did the King of Moab bring great harm to Israel (Numbers 25:1-9)?

He sent their women to seduce the Israelite men and lead them to participate in idol worship. As a result, 24,000 men died from the plague.

\*Balaam was killed. God is a holy God.

**Map:** Locate Mt. Nebo, also called Pisgah. Also locate Jericho.

9. Moses died on Mt. Nebo before they crossed the Jordan River. Who actually led the Israelites into Canaan (Joshua 1:1-9)? Joshua. When he led the march against Jericho, who was the Canaanite prostitute that, with her family, was kept alive when the walls fell down (Joshua 6:20-23)? Rahab.

10. How was Naomi related to Rahab?

She was related by marriage. Naomi's husband and Salmon, the Israelite man Rahab married were related.

\*Some Bible scholars believe Salmon, the prince of Judah, who married Rahab, was Elimelech's brother. Others believe they were closely related but distanced by several generations. The Bible does not make it clear.

**Discuss:** *God delivered Rahab and changed her heart and life. Is there anything God cannot change or forgive if a person trusts Him and turns to Him?*

\* Psalm 103:12; 1 John 1:9.

**Map:** Look at a Bible map showing Canaan and the land distributed to the tribe of Judah.

11. In Canaan the allotted land was distributed to the tribe of Judah. Their area was approximately forty miles wide and fifty miles long. How did Naomi say they measured distance (pg. 30)? Instead of miles, it was so many days walk.

12. *In Genesis 49:8-12, Jacob prophesied that Judah's tribe would be the greatest of all the tribes and that a ruler from Judah would be the greatest ruler of all nations. What ruler was Jacob speaking of (pg. 31)? Jesus Christ, Messiah.*

\*He will return to earth to rule over all the nations (Matthew 26:63-64). As the Son of God, Messiah possesses the power of God's authority.

**Map:** Locate Bethlehem.

13. *Naomi and Elimelech were from the village of Bethlehem. See 1 Samuel 16:1, 13 and Luke 2:4-7. David and Jesus were also born there.*

\*Micah 5:2 prophesied "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times," speaking of Jesus.

14. *The name Elimelech means My God is King (pg. 31).*

\*Keep in mind, Israel had no king. Many did what was right in their own eyes.

15. *Elimelech and Naomi had two sons. They were Mahlon and Kilion.*

\*In some Bibles the name Kilion is translated Chilion. It is the same person.

**Map:** Compare the location of Bethlehem, near Jerusalem, to the location of Moab.

16. *When Elimelech and Naomi moved from Bethlehem in Judah to Moab during the famine, Naomi was aware of Moab's history. a) What type of worship did the Moabites have (pg. 32)? Idolatry. b) What god did they worship? Chemosh.*

17. *Whose descendants were the Moabites? Lot and his oldest daughter. What nation came from the younger daughter? Ammon.*

\*Lot, a nephew of Abraham, escaped from the fire and destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis chapter 19). The exact location of Sodom and Gomorrah is not known for certain, however, it is believed to be near the Dead Sea's eastern edge; some claim it was on the north edge and others claim the south edge. The sin of sodomy (practice of homosexuality) will be discussed in another study. Lot's wife turned into a pillar of salt when she looked back. God's angel had clearly told them not to look back See Genesis 19:17. Their two virgin daughters escaped with Lot. They made him drunk and committed incest in order for each to have a child. God forbids incest. "No one is to approach any close relative to have sexual relations. I am the Lord" (Leviticus 18:6).

**Discuss:** a) *Do you think the problem, of Lot's daughters wanting children, could have been resolved in a different way?* b) *What decisions have you made that brought undesirable circumstances later?* c) *What did you learn from that?*

\*Lot's daughters experienced God's power in delivering them from death in Sodom. They could have asked God to provide husbands for them. In Genesis 18:14a, the Lord told Abraham, "Is there anything too hard for me?" If a couple cannot have biological children, God may provide adoptive children. He may provide a lonely child they know, who needs someone to care about and mentor him/her. "And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it" (John 14:13-14). To ask in His name means to pray as Jesus would; "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me, yet not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42).

18. *What is the meaning of El Shaddai, a name of God (pg. 34)?*  
Almighty God who strengthens and helps us.

**Discuss:** *If you were faced with a similar circumstance as Elimelech's and Naomi's hunger, what do you think you would do? Why?*

\*Elimelech and Naomi did not have the written Word of God. The fundamentals of their faith were passed down orally from generation to generation. They knew about the law, the blessings and curses, the commandments, the names of God, and the history of God's provision for His people.

19. Name four reasons for the heaviness and darkness in Naomi's life.  
a) Elimelech died. b) Her sons married Moabite women. c) She was away from her people and traditions. d) Her sons died.

**Discuss:** a) *What disappointments have caused heaviness and darkness in your life?* b) *What gave you hope?*

\* Our hope is in God, who is still on His throne. Psalm 33:20-22; Ephesians 3:20.

20. *What drew Naomi back to Bethlehem and what was the pivotal event that released her to go?* She longed for her own people, longed to feel at peace with her Lord, she had no means of support and she felt alone. The pivotal event was when she heard there was food in Bethlehem.

21. *Why did Naomi encourage her daughters-in-law to stay in Moab?* They were childless. She could not produce more sons to marry them and give them children.

22. *Where did Naomi direct her bitterness (Ruth 1:13)?* She felt God's hand was against her.

\*In their culture, the children cared for their parents, especially a widowed mother in their old age. With her husband and both sons gone, she felt abandoned and vulnerable.

**Discuss:** *Have you ever felt God's hand was against you? What did you do?*

\*Psalm 119:169-170.

23. a) *How did Ruth show her commitment to Naomi?* She pled to return with her, to live where she lived and die where she died. She asked God to deal with her severely if she separated from Naomi.

b) *How strong was Orpah's commitment to Naomi?* Not very strong. She returned to her own people.

24. *Why did Naomi ask her friends to call her Mara and what does it mean?* She felt God had made her life bitter – she went away full and came back empty. She felt her LORD afflicted her and brought misfortune against her. Mara means bitter.

**Discuss:** *When you experience bitter disappointments and pain, what is your response? Do you pour out your feelings to your Heavenly Father? . . . To a close friend? . . . To a family member?*

\* God understands our pain and comforts us so that we might comfort others (See 2 Corinthians 1:3-4). It also helps to talk to a caring person about our inner pain. Often as we talk about our situation, we begin to see it from another perspective. God will shape our thinking to His if we ask for and desire His viewpoint.

### **Read Ruth 2:1-23**

25. *God brought Naomi back to Bethlehem at barley harvest time.*

a) *What Hebrew Festival is celebrated then (at sunset, day fourteen of Nisan/April) which commemorates the Hebrew's last night in Egypt when they were delivered from slavery (pg. 37)? Passover feast.*

b) *Why were the Hebrews in Goshen to kill a lamb and put its blood on the doorposts? Pharaoh refused to let them go. God brought ten plagues upon the Egyptians. The last plague was death to all of the firstborn in Egypt, but any firstborn in a house with the blood on the doorposts was safe. God passed over them.*

c) *Why do you think God told the Hebrews to celebrate Passover once a year? To remember God's mighty power to deliver them and to teach their descendants.*

\*The Passover was observed to teach their descendants about 1) the death of a lamb and application of its blood to save their firstborn from death and 2) about their deliverance from slavery in Egypt (the exodus).

**Discuss:** *What do we observe to remember and to teach our descendants about the death of Jesus, the Lamb of God and the shedding of His blood to save us from eternal death and from the bondage of sin? See 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.*

\* We observe communion with the bread and the cup to remember His last Passover and His death on the cross (the very next day) for our eternal life and freedom from our sins. Read Isaiah 53:4-7; 1 John 1:7, 9; Hebrews 9:12, 14. When we are in Christ, we are safe and secure.

26. *How did the Jewish law of gleaning bring hope to Naomi and Ruth? During harvest, some grain around the edges and what was dropped would be left for the poor and the alien. Ruth was willing to go out and pick the grain that was left to provide food for them.*

**Discuss:** *Share a time when you had financial difficulties and God gave you hope.*

*\*Be prepared to share from your experience.*

27. *What did God provide for Naomi and Ruth when Ruth gleaned? God provided Boaz, who proved to be a compassionate landowner/kinsman. He provided protection. He provided lunch for Ruth. He provided kind workers who dropped grain for her. He provided plenty of grain for their sustenance. He provided an opportunity to return to Boaz's fields until the barley and wheat harvests were finished.*

**Discuss:** *a) Should you let a need be known? b) What can you do to help others who are in need (See James 1:27; Matthew 25:37-40)?*

*\*1 Timothy 5:3-7; Galatians 6:2, 10; Acts 2:45, 4:35; 1 John 3:17.*

### **Read Ruth 3:1-18**

28. *What are the responsibilities of a kinsman-redeemer ( pg. 40)? Redeeming family property and marrying a childless widow to raise up children in her dead husband's name.*

*\*The kinsman-redeemer must be the closest male relative. Note that it was the widow's responsibility to propose to the kinsman-redeemer that this be done.*

29. *Where did Naomi send Ruth and what was the result? To the threshing floor to lie at Boaz's feet after he went to sleep. The result was that he said he would redeem her if a closer relative did not want to. He sent a gift of barley for their use. The proposal and acceptance will be discussed in the Ruth study.*

### **Read Ruth 4:1-22**

30. *When did Boaz settle the matter with the closer relative and what was the outcome? The very next day. The closer relative decided not to redeem. Boaz married Ruth.*

31. *How did this marriage affect Naomi? It brought her great joy. It gave her a son and grandson who would care for her in her old age. She went to live in the comfort of Boaz's and Ruth's home. She was able to love and care for her grandson Obed, whose name means "worshiper."*

\*Naomi's bitterness, in the midst of grief, subsided. In its place God gave her insight and purpose which brought about great joy.

### **Personal Application**

\*Many of the Discuss portions involved personal application.

32. *What insights have you gained from this study?*

33. *Can you identify with Naomi in grief and/or bitterness? Do you identify with her as she resolves the problem with God's help? Or are you somewhere in between?*

34. *Grief is good. It helps bring healing to the soul. God provides grace to endure and to move through the grief with a trusting heart. When a person misses the grace of God, bitterness takes root. It becomes sharp; painful to oneself and to others (Hebrews 12:15). If you are grieving, where are you in the process? \_\_\_\_\_*

35. *Think back to the discussion of the Passover. Those who were inside the door where the blood was applied, were safe and secure. Jesus said, I am the gate (door), whoever enters through me will be saved (John 10:9a). Have you entered into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ by placing your faith and trust in Him? \_\_\_\_\_*

*If not, you are invited to accept Him now as your Savior. Pray: Lord, I believe I have done wrong and fallen short of what You want from me. I confess my wrongdoing to You and ask You to wash me clean, through Jesus. I accept His death on the cross for me, and ask You to give me eternal life. Help me live a life that pleases You. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

*"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13).*

**Exercise:** *Think about decisions you have made that pulled you away from God. Naomi went into Moab, a place of emptiness and darkness for her soul. She returned to Bethlehem, a house of bread and fullness for her soul. Determine to confess your wrongdoings to God (1 John 1:7, 9) and come to the place of His favor and peace. You will experience richness for your soul that only God can give.*

**Prayer:** Pray the closing prayer in the book or use your own if more appropriate. Consider asking someone in the class to close in prayer, but do it in advance so the person is prepared or can decline. Many do not feel comfortable praying out loud in the presence of others.