

# Let Me Join Your Nation

*The story of Ruth,  
from Moabite  
princess to  
matriarch of the  
Davidic dynasty*

*A compilation  
of Talmudic  
and Midrashic  
sources*

*Including a Hebrew-English Megillas Ruth*

Y O S E F   D E U T S C H

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# 1 Days of Judgment

Moshe received the Torah from Hashem on Mount Sinai, and he remained the arbiter and custodian of the Torah and its orally transmitted traditions for the rest of his life. Before he passed away, he appointed Yehoshua to take his place. Yehoshua, at the end of his life, transferred this role to a group of sages called the *Zekeinim*, the Elders, and at the end of their tenure they passed it on to the *Shoftim*, the Judges.<sup>1</sup> The judges fulfilled this role one at a time, in a sequence that lasted for hundreds of years, from Osniel ben Kenaz, the first judge and the brother of Kalev, until Shemuel, the last of the judges.

The period of the Judges was a strange and challenging time in the history of the Jewish people. Moshe had ruled over the Jewish people as an uncrowned king, and Yehoshua as well was considered a king.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, the judges who became leaders

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1. *Avos d'Rabbi Nasan* 1:3 with *Binyan Yehoshua*. One opinion holds that the *Zekeinim* included Eldad and Meidad, who prophesied in Moshe's lifetime. Other commentators suggest that the *Zekeinim* included the tribe of Levi, while still others maintain that Kalev was among them (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 3:7).

2. The Gemara (*Yoma* 73b) states that only a king may ask questions via the Urim v'Tumim, and Yehoshua consulted with it on a number of occasions.

of the Jewish people were not considered kings. They were more like chieftans, who explicated and applied the laws of the Torah and provided moral leadership, but they had no executive power.<sup>3</sup> This went on for hundreds of years until King Shaul and King David ushered in the period of the Kings.

How did society function during the period of the Judges? "In those days," says the prophet several times,<sup>4</sup> "there was no king in Yisrael, and everyone did as he saw fit." In other words, there was an absence of government in the conventional sense. The people were expected to govern themselves by adhering to the Torah. If there was a question about the application of the Torah to a situation or in a dispute, the people were expected to go to the judiciary and submit to the guidance and ruling of the judges, from the minor judges in every town and city up to the supreme judicial authorities of the nation, whose names are recorded in *Mishneh Torah*, the book of Judges.

This system did not work as it should. Although there were stretches of stability, once for eighty years<sup>5</sup> and a few times for forty years,<sup>6</sup> turbulence and chaos were more the rule than the exception. During the good times, the people were on a high spiritual level. They learned Torah and lived by its dictates. But again and again, they succumbed to the temptations of their pagan neighbors' lifestyles. They descended to idolatry and immoral behavior. The judges were righteous and exalted figures, and although the supreme judges were generally accepted by the populace, the people rejected those of the lower ranks and elected in their place judges as decadent and corrupt as they were.<sup>7</sup> And

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3. See *Shoftim* 24:25 with Radak. See *Chesed leMeshicho* on *Ruth* 1:1.

4. *Shoftim* 17:6, 18:1, 21:25.

5. *Shoftim* 3:29.

6. *Shoftim* 3:11, 5:31, 8:28.

7. See *Bereishis Rabbah* 42:3; *Ruth Rabbah* 1:1; Malbim on *Ruth* 1:1. See Tosafos (*Bava Basra* 15b) and their query regarding the corruption of the judges. See also *Toras Chaim*; *Chiddushei haBach*.

thereby, they brought down upon themselves divine wrath and retribution.

The people saw Ehud as a leader and savior, but not someone on the level of a supreme judge. The fact that Barak, a male judge, was subservient to Devorah, a female judge, was seen by the populace as a deficiency in leadership. They also questioned the lack of humility they suspected Devorah of possessing. Shimshon had a flaw in that he sinned with his eyes, and Gid'on, like Ehud, was seen as merely a savior. (Ehud even made an *efod*, a cloak, which was eventually used in association with idol-worship.) The people in Yiftach's time saw him as a murderer because of the vow he made that either killed his daughter or ruined her life. Collectively speaking, the period of the Judges was continually marked by some semblance of the three capital sins, and hence it was seen as a period flawed in the leaders as well as in the led.<sup>8</sup>

The story of Ruth begins during one of the spiritual low points of the period of the Judges. The generation was riddled with deceit and moral depravity. Even the best among the people were without redeeming qualities.<sup>9</sup> Society was riddled through and through with corruption, from the people to the judges; from people's private lives to the courts.<sup>10</sup> On the surface the Jews presented themselves as faithful to their religion, but in truth they had fallen to the level of their pagan neighbors. The practice of idolatry became widespread.

There was no trust among the general populace, and the criminal underworld ruled society. People took the law into their own

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8. For more on this subject, see *Yefeh Anaf* on *Ruth Rabbah* 1:1; *Lekach Tov*, *Invei haGefen* on *Ruth* 1:1.

9. See *Bava Basra* 15b with Rashi.

10. According to some commentators, the burden of guilt rested on the shoulders of the judges, while the people remained in good standing. According to others, the judges were righteous, but their flaws and imperfections, stemming from either a lack of ability or a lack of dedication, prevented them from steering the people in the right direction. This failure brought retribution upon the generation.

hands; they distorted and interpreted it to their own advantage with no regard for the truth.<sup>11</sup> Ignorant people without any qualifications, eager to line their pockets, were elected to the judiciary as long as they were willing to be accessories to the travesties being perpetrated in the name of the Torah.<sup>12</sup> The younger generation, rebelling against the rigorous demands of righteous living, turned on their elders and pushed them aside. “Your time has passed, old folks,” they would say. “Time to let some young blood show you how to get things done.”<sup>13</sup>

The few righteous judges who still held on to their integrity were shunned and mocked. Trying to be discreet and subtle, they sometimes rebuked people by saying, “Remove the splinter from between your teeth.” This was admonition to repent.<sup>14</sup> It was a nuanced way of saying, “We know about your secret sins. We know about the idols you keep hidden in your home. Just as a splinter lodges between the teeth, so does sinfulness disrupt the purity of the soul. It needs to be removed.”

But the people would laugh in the judges’ faces and say, “How dare you rebuke us? Do you think you’re any better than we are? We know all about you and your pretensions of piety. You are pompous frauds. Your transgressions are far greater than ours. If we have splinters, you have massive beams. Before you go lecturing to us about our splinters, why don’t you remove your own beams?”

Sometimes the judges would rebuke people by saying, “Your silver is overlaid with tarnish.” This meant: “Your public behavior is a façade. You may present yourself as honest men, but we know you are thieves. Repent!”

The people were still not impressed. “Your wine is thoroughly

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11. See Maharal on *Bava Basra* 15b; *Me’am Lo’ez* on *Ruth* 1:1.

12. *Igeres Shemuel*, Malbim on *Ruth* 1:1.

13. *Kol haTor*, *ibid*.

14. *Ruth Rabbah*, *Pesichta* 2.

diluted," they would retort. "You are no better than we are. We know all about you. Your righteousness drowns in a sea of sin.<sup>15</sup> Before you go rebuking others, why don't you turn some of that rebuke on yourselves?"<sup>16</sup>

If a judge should have the 'temerity' to order lashes or some other form of corporal punishment, the defendant would react with rage. "How dare you!" he would shout as he assaulted the judge and beat him viciously. "Let me give you a taste of your own medicine. How do you like it?"<sup>17</sup>

The righteous among the people in Eretz Yisrael saw the corruption all around them, and they were terrified. The corrupt judges who were supposed to administer the laws of the Torah honestly and faithfully were making a travesty of it.<sup>18</sup> Even if once in a while they ruled justly, their overall sinfulness and dishonesty made their judicial offices an abomination. In such circumstances, how long could divine retribution be avoided?<sup>19</sup> The few righteous individuals who did protest were ridiculed and derided. The rest bore their fear and apprehension in silence.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, divine patience was exhausted, so to speak.<sup>21</sup> Hashem decided to bring His sinful people to divine judgment, and the

15. *Ruth Rabbah*, *Pesichta* 2, 7; *Bava Basra* 15b with *Ben Yehoyada*; *Chasam Sofer*, *Gishmei Berachah*, *Toras Chesed* on *Ruth* 1:1. See *Yeshayahu* 1:22 with *Ibn Ezra*. *Iyun Yaakov* maintains that this was referring to Elimelech, who was indeed righteous but performed sinful acts. See also *Eitz Yosef* on *Tanchuma*, *Shemini* 9, for his commentary. See *Maharsha*; *Rabbeinu Gershon*.

16. See *Tzefaniah* 2:1; *Bava Metzia* 107b.

17. See *Igeres Shemuel* on *Ruth* 1:1; *Ruth Rabbah* 1:1, *Pesichta* 7. Had the judges themselves been God-fearing they would have been respected and listened to (*Tiferes Tzion*).

18. *Ruth Rabbah*, *Pesichta* 7; *Bereishis Rabbah* 42:3; *Vayikra Rabbah* 11:7 with *Mahrzu*.

19. *Meishiv Nefesh* on *Ruth* 1:1.

20. *Ruth Rabbah*, *Pesichta* 2; *Chasam Sofer* on *Bava Basra* 15b; *Torah Temimah* on *Ruth* 1:1.

21. See *Maharal* on *Bava Basra* 15b.

first to be judged were the judges themselves.<sup>22</sup> The courts of the Torah are called *elohim*, a word closely related one of the Names of Hashem.

“Do these judges have no honor?” Hashem declared. “I have endowed them with My own Name,<sup>23</sup> and yet they cheat and lie. They are a disgrace.<sup>24</sup> Woe to a generation that must judge its judges.<sup>25</sup> Woe to a generation that is starved of Torah,<sup>26</sup> that disregards and disgraces its Torah sages<sup>27</sup> and occupies itself instead with olive groves and vineyards.<sup>28</sup> This people and the land with which they are so obsessively preoccupied should by rights be torn asunder by earthquakes.<sup>29</sup> I have sworn never to destroy them or send them back to Egypt, but I will make them suffer. I will bring a famine on the land.<sup>30</sup> These people shamed the judiciary, and now they will be shamed by the hunger they will have to endure.<sup>31</sup>”

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22. *Megillah* 10b; *Ruth Rabbah*, *Pesichta* 7; Ibn Ezra on *Ruth* 1:1; Zohar, *Ruth* 76b.

23. *Ruth Rabbah*, *Pesichta* 1.

24. *Tanchuma*, *Shemini* 9.

25. *Ruth Rabbah*, *Pesichta* 1; *Bava Basra* 15b.

26. *Ruth Rabbah* 1:1, *Pesichta* 7; *Ruth Zuta* on *Ruth* 1. One reason was because the people lacked Torah guidance (*Meishiv Nefesh* on *Ruth* 1:2).

27. *Shevus Yaakov* on *Ruth* 1:1.

28. *Ruth Rabbah*, *Pesichta* 2. Hashem also held them accountable for not eulogizing Yehoshua properly.

29. *Ruth Rabbah*, *Pesichta* 2.

30. *Ruth Rabbah*, *Pesichta* 2–3; *Ruth Rabbah* 1:4. This would be one of ten famines that the Torah documents.

31. *Vayikra Rabbah* 11:7 with Mahrzu. Whether it was because of their sinfulness or the fact that they didn’t rebuke the evildoers, the judiciary was held accountable for the rampant corruption. See *Igeres Shemuel* on *Ruth* 1:1; *Ruth Rabbah*, *Pesichta* 2. The Chasam Sofer writes that because Beis Lechem, where Elimelech resided before leaving Eretz Yisrael, was such a rich and fertile land, its residents had too much free time on their hands and spent it idly slandering and mocking anyone they could think of. By being visited by a famine they would no longer have free time, and being occupied with hard work would mitigate their scorn for the judges and leaders of the land. This sentiment is elaborated on in *Chovos haLevavos*, *sha’ar habitachon* 3.



“They will be afflicted with a double famine, both spiritual and physical. I will deprive them of a prophet who could nourish them with the fruits of his divine inspiration. And I will also deprive the land of its bounty so that they will face the specter of physical starvation.<sup>32</sup> Famine will bring them down from their arrogance, self-absorption and obsession with their desires. It will make them stop and reconsider the way they have been living and lead them toward repentance.”

Famine was indeed the appropriate form of retribution.<sup>33</sup> Hashem sends famine when judges are corrupt and deceitful, when thievery and trickery are rampant and when dishonest weights and measures prevail in the marketplace.<sup>34</sup>

## A Man Named Elimelech

In the tribal lands of Yehudah, a man named Elimelech lived in the town of Efras. This town was also known as Beis Lechem,<sup>35</sup> the House of Bread, because its rich soil produced so much wheat that the town was always full of bountiful supplies of bread.<sup>36</sup> Elimelech was a scion of a very distinguished family, a man of substance and means. He was a grandson of Nachshon ben Aminadav, the prince of the tribe

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32. *Ruth Rabbah, Pesichta* 2–3.

33. There are differing opinions regarding the location and extent of the famine when it struck. According to some it was limited to Eretz Yisrael, a divine sign that it was in retribution for what was taking place inside those borders (*Shoreshet Yishai* on *Ruth* 1:1). According to others, it also spread to the neighboring lands (*Ya'avetz*, *ibid.*). Some commentators suggest that it was not a true famine resulting from a failure of crops but an unexpected, though not necessarily precipitous rise in prices—just enough to get the attention of the people and encourage them to repent. For example, the amount that previously could buy 42 *se'ah* could now buy only 41 *se'ah*. See *Ruth Rabbah* 1:4. Even this slight markup was a message to the Jews that something was wrong.

34. See Zohar, *Ruth* 77; *Shabbos* 32b–33a; *Shemos Rabbah* 31:8; *Ruth Rabbah* 1:2; *Igeres Shemuel, Toras Chesed* on *Ruth* 1:1.

35. See Ralbag, Malbim on *Ruth* 1:2.

36. Rokeach on *Ruth* 1:1.

of Yehudah during the period of the Exodus. He was a distinguished *talmid chacham* in his own right, and an exceedingly wealthy man. He was also an important leader of the Jewish people.<sup>37</sup>

Elimelech was married to his niece Naomi, a woman with a pedigree comparable to his and, more than her husband,<sup>38</sup> a widespread reputation for valor.<sup>39</sup> She was filled with kindness and a most pleasant temperament; she always sought out the hungry and fed them.<sup>40</sup> Elimelech and Naomi had two sons, Machlon and Kilyon, princely<sup>41</sup> and righteous young men, rising leaders of the generation,<sup>42</sup> the pride and joy of Beis Lechem.<sup>43</sup>

As a man of great influence, prestige and power, Elimelech was in an ideal position to turn back the tides of corruption that threatened to engulf the Jewish people, but he was too self-absorbed to rise to the occasion. Elimelech's name, which can be read as "my Lord is King," can also be construed as *eilai melech*, "I deserve to be king."<sup>44</sup> Instead of living up to the exalted form

37. See *Bava Basra* 91a; Rashi, *Igeres Shemuel* on *Ruth* 1:1; *Tanchuma*, *Shemini* 9; Rashi on *Ruth* 1:1.

38. *Igeres Shemuel* on *Ruth* 1:2.

39. *Bava Basra* 91a; Malbim on *Ruth* 1:2. *Likutei Anshei Shem* maintains that in fact Naomi was more respected than Elimelech. *Cheishev Sofer* adds that people would compliment Elimelech for being Naomi's husband. She was far greater than he was.

40. *Ruth Rabbah* 2:5; *Midrash Aishes Chayil*, *Chesed leMeshicho* on *Ruth* 1:2.

41. See *Ruth Rabbah* 2:5.

42. See *Bava Basra* 91a; Rambam in *Mishneh Torah*, *Melachim* 5:9. *Tiferes Tzion* on *Ruth Rabbah* 2:5 says that they were only righteous outwardly, but inwardly they were corrupt.

43. *Meishiv Nefesh* on *Ruth* 1:2. At this point, they were great and righteous people. It was only later that they fell from grace.

44. *Ruth Rabbah* 2:5. See *Gishmei Berachah*, which says that Elimelech believed that as someone from the tribe of Yehudah he was the forerunner to Mashiach. As a result, he placed upon himself the illusion of royalty. *Meishiv Nefesh*, *Kol haTor* add, however, that Elimelech was inconsistent, displaying the worst of two worlds: although a king supports the needy among his people, Elimelech placed the mantle of royalty upon himself and yet was stingy in sustaining the people over whom he ruled. If Hashem blessed him with wealth it was incumbent upon him to support the poor among his constituents. *Ta'ama d'Kra* adds

of his name, Elimelech took an arrogant view of himself because of his wealth, lineage and power.<sup>45</sup> He refused to shoulder the burden of responsibility that his status had thrust upon him.

When the famine struck Eretz Yisrael, Elimelech did not exhort the people to repent and thereby bring the famine to an end. Instead he decided to abandon his people to their fate, seeking greener pastures for himself and his family.<sup>46</sup> Naomi did not want to leave.<sup>47</sup> She wanted to stay and give encouragement and material support to the hungry and impoverished,<sup>48</sup> but Elimelech was adamant that they leave as soon as possible.<sup>49</sup> He didn't want to be beset by hungry beggars who would drain him of all his wealth.<sup>50</sup> Naomi had no choice but to submit to her husband's will and join him on his journey to another land.<sup>51</sup>

The question now was the choice of destination. Elimelech decided not to make a unilateral decision. He called a family meeting, and after much deliberation they decided to head east to the neighboring land of Moav, where bread was in plentiful supply.<sup>52</sup> Some commentators suggest that the land of Moav also appealed to him because of the stinginess of its people. He himself was miserly, overly concerned that supporting his people would reduce his wealth. In Moav he would find kindred spirits.

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that a king acts in the interest of his populace, but Elimelech considered only his personal interests. See *Bava Basra* 11a.

45. *Igeres Shemuel* on *Ruth* 1:2.

46. Tosafos, *Meishiv Nefesh* on *Ruth* 1:1.

47. *Igeres Shemuel*, Alshich, Malbim, *ibid*.

48. *Chesed leMeshicho* on *Ruth* 1:2.

49. Tosafos, *Meishiv Nefesh* on *Ruth* 1:1.

50. Rashi on *ibid.*; *Lekach Tov*, introduction to *Megillas Ruth*; *Torah Temimah* on *Ruth* 1:19.

51. Rashi on *Ruth* 1:3. See *Toras Chesed*, which says that Elimelech's wife and children all left willingly and thus also bore responsibility.

52. Tosafos, *Igeres Shemuel* on *Ruth* 1:2. In essence, Elimelech left a place known for its abundance of bread, for a place that didn't hand out bread to the Jews when they needed it most (*Igeres Shemuel*).

The choice of Moav added insult to injury. Not only were Elimelech and his family abandoning the finest part of Eretz Yisrael, a land of holiness and purity,<sup>53</sup> they had chosen as their destination a land known for the malevolence, selfishness and ingratitude of its population, a land whose people had refused to help the children of Israel in their time of need, a land manifestly inappropriate for a righteous and distinguished Jewish family. Nonetheless, their choice was made and they prepared for their journey.<sup>54</sup>

Elimelech and his family gathered their vast wealth without fanfare, and loaded it onto their horses, donkeys and camels. They also took along their large retinue of menservants and maidservants.<sup>55</sup> Then they left Beis Lechem and began their journey. The people they left behind soon realized this was no pleasure trip, that Elimelech had turned his back on them in their time of need. Some people began to refer to him as Yokim, a derogatory name meaning one who gets up and goes.<sup>56</sup>

For all his lack of both courage and fortitude, however, Elimelech left Eretz Yisrael with reasonably good intentions. Not expecting the famine to last very long, he thought he would be able to return<sup>57</sup> within no more than three months.<sup>58</sup> He also had

53. *Lekach Tov* on *Ruth* 1:2.

54. *Igeres Shemuel*, Rokeach, Alshich on *Ruth* 1:1. One view suggests that Elimelech wanted to free himself of being a source of support for the Jews so that they would place their faith in Hashem instead of in man (*Meishiv Nefesh* on *ibid.*). A similar sentiment can be found in *Megillas Esther*. See Yosef Deutsch, *Let My Nation Live* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 2002), p. 214.

55. *Lekach Tov* on *Ruth* 1:1.

56. See *I Divrei haYamim* 4:22; *Ruth Rabbah* 2:4 with *Tiferes Tzion*. *Mishnas Rav Eliezer* 4 adds that Elimelech originally earned this name because he “kept” (from the word *kayam*, which has the same letters as Yokim) the Torah.

57. See *Chasam Sofer* on *Ruth* 1:1. Elimelech had the freedom and autonomy to leave Moav any time he wished. The Moabites had no plans to stop him at the border (*Tiferes Tzion*).

58. *Igeres Shemuel* on *Ruth* 1:1.

no intention of settling within the heart of the pagan Moabite society. Instead, he chose a small village some distance from the capital, close enough for convenience yet isolated enough to allow his family to preserve their Jewish faith and identity.<sup>59</sup>

In fact, it occurred to Elimelech that living in the serene environment of the small Moabite village might even be more conducive to good Jewish values and observance than living in Eretz Yisrael during the famine.<sup>60</sup> The stresses of the famine, he reasoned, would only serve to exacerbate the corruption and lawlessness of Eretz Yisrael. People desperate for food would rob and steal without compunction, and their contentious disputes would further compromise the judiciary and endanger the judges. In Moav, on the other hand, they could learn Torah and do mitzvos without any distractions or disturbances. Leaving Eretz Yisrael was a difficult thing to do, but living in Moav had its compensations.<sup>61</sup>

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59. See *Shoresh Yishai*, *Igeres Shemuel*, *Meishiv Nefesh*, Malbim, *ibid*. *Me'am Lo'ez* points out that this was similar to the attitude of the tribes when settling in Goshen upon entering Egypt. This is indicated by the fact that as proud children of Israel, they didn't change their names. However, moving to Moav was still a poor decision, despite his virtuous intentions. See Alshich; *Shoresh Yishai*; Gra; *Ruth Rabbah* 2:4 with *Yefeh Anaf*.

60. *Igeres Shemuel*, Malbim on *Ruth* 1:1. See also *Meishiv Nefesh*, which holds that Elimelech's motives for staying away from the hubbub of the cities was in order not to be found by the poor seeking him out for support. See Alshich. See *Igeres Shemuel on Ruth* 1:7.

61. Gra, *Igeres Shemuel*, Malbim on *Ruth* 1:1. Another opinion holds that when Elimelech saw that the Jews were shaming the judges, he was concerned that by remaining in Beis Lechem it would appear as though he were supporting such behavior. However, Elimelech is held accountable because he could have shown his disdain for how the populace was treating judges by staying and protesting the citizens' behavior (*Zohar, Ruth* 77). *Meishiv Nefesh, Ruth* 1:1, explains that Elimelech left a wicked people and went to Moav because he saw with *ruach hakodesh* that the seeds of Mashiach would come from there. He hoped he would be a part of it. (In a sense he was, because his son Machlon's wife would be the forebear of Mashiach. See *Ruth Rabbah* 2:5 with Radal, *Tiferes Tzion*.) Alshich adds that Elimelech had a tradition that Mashiach would come during a time of famine. Moreover, when he realized that Mashiach would

Some commentators go so far as to suggest that Elimelech emigrated from Eretz Yisrael as a form of personal atonement. He felt partially responsible for the sad state of affairs in the land, and therefore took upon himself the hardships of exile as expiation for his sins. Indeed, even with all the wealth he transported with him, exile from home was undoubtedly a trying experience.<sup>62</sup>

## Settling in Moav

Elimelech and his family, their animals laden with riches and their servants accompanying them, arrived at the small Moabite village in which they had chosen to live for the duration of the famine. They settled in and tried to acclimate themselves to their new surroundings and forge for themselves a pattern of normalcy. On their first Shabbos, they laid the table with their best plates and cutlery, prepared delicious food and illuminated their house in honor of the holy day. They spent their time learning Torah and feeling the contentment of a tranquil Jewish life.

But the isolated Moabite village did not live up to their expectations for very long. The populace, although small in number, was a fervent stronghold of pagan culture. Elimelech and Naomi quickly realized that they would be putting themselves at risk by remaining there, so they decided to pack up once again and move elsewhere. This time they chose a large town, but in a remote, mountainous region, far from the pagan temples in the central Moabite areas. Surely there the people would not be as depraved and immoral as in the main districts and suburbs.

Once again, however, Elimelech and his family realized that they had made another bad choice. The people in the new town were even worse than the people in the village from which they

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have Moabite roots and being that he was from the tribe of Yehudah, Moav seemed to be the perfect place to live at that time.

62. *Chasam Sofer* on *Ruth* 1:1.

had fled in revulsion. Moreover, the water supply in their new location was inadequate to serve the needs of its sizable population. It had to be rationed, which created hardships in everyday life.

Elimelech finally realized that there were simply no locations of even moderate moral and spiritual standards in all the lands of Moav. They had settled among a depraved and immoral people, and all they could do was make the best of it until they could return to Eretz Yisrael—hopefully in the not too distant future. Elimelech’s main consideration for now was to select a place without beggars to pester him, a place where his wealth could be preserved intact. After careful consideration, he brought his family back to the first village. They settled in a spacious house in a secluded corner of the fields surrounding the village, a place where Elimelech could count his money without being disturbed by poor people.<sup>63</sup>

Despite any worthwhile intentions Elimelech may have had, Hashem strongly disapproved of his decision to save himself and abandon his people;<sup>64</sup> a man of such standing should have thought of the people before he thought of himself.<sup>65</sup> There are many things he could and should have done: spoken out against the corruption and moral decline of Jewish society;<sup>66</sup> exhorted his brothers and sisters to repent and return to Hashem with all their hearts and convince them that this was the only way to bring the

63. *Ruth Rabbah* 2:6 with Rashash; *Mishnas Rabbi Eliezer* 4; *Igeres Shemuel* on *Ruth* 1:7. See Radal and footnotes to *Lekach Tov* for their commentary on the chain of events. Tosafos on *Ruth* 1:2 write that they lived in the cities for five years and in the suburbs for five years. *Shevus Yaakov* on *Ruth* 1:2 says that by this point Elimelech had lost his wealth.

64. See *Ruth Rabbah* 1:4; *Bava Kama* 60b. Rambam in *Mishneh Torah, Melachim* 5:9, writes that one is allowed to leave Eretz Yisrael during a famine in order to find food. According to the opinion that there was no famine, merely a spike in prices, this didn’t justify Elimelech in leaving Eretz Yisrael (Rav Vidal ha-Tzorfasi).

65. See *Igeres Shemuel*, Malbim on *Ruth* 1:2–3.

66. Ibn Yechiah on *Ruth* 1:1; *Tanchuma, Shemini* 9.

famine to a quick and merciful end;<sup>67</sup> and prayed for salvation,<sup>68</sup> even if he didn't think the sinners were worthy of his prayers.<sup>69</sup> He should have put his vast wealth, which could have sustained the poor for ten years, at the disposal of the starving masses. He should have shared their suffering.<sup>70</sup>

But Elimelech did none of these things. Instead, he fled from the scene of adversity, thinking only of himself and his family, depriving the people of guidance, inspiration and sustenance. Moreover, his departure broke the spirits of the already desperate people. He had betrayed them, and for this he was held accountable for all the sins of the Jewish people.<sup>71</sup>

Elimelech demonstrated his contempt for the Jewish people, and in return he fell victim to Hashem's contempt.<sup>72</sup> He showed no compassion to his people, so Hashem showed no compassion to him.<sup>73</sup> He ran away to escape the national suffering, but he would soon find out that his own particular brand of suffering would follow him to the grave.<sup>74</sup>

## Misfortune

Elimelech did not enjoy the comforts of his new life in Moav for very long.<sup>75</sup> For no ap-

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67. *Ruth Rabbah* 1:4; Ibn Yechiah, *Meishiv Nefesh* on *Ruth* 1:1, 2; Zohar, *Ruth* 77b.

68. *Ruth Rabbah*, *Pesichta* 6; Ibn Yechiah, *Meishiv Nefesh* on *Ruth* 1:1. *Igeres Shemuel* states that besides Elimelech, there was no one of stature capable of annulling the decree.

69. *Nachalas Yaakov* on *Ruth* 1:2.

70. *Ruth Rabbah* 1:4; Rashi, Ibn Yechiah, *Meishiv Nefesh*, *Eshkol haKofer*, *Igeres Shemuel* on *Ruth* 1:1; *Tanchuma*, *Shemini* 9; Zohar, *Ruth* 80. In fact the famine lasted for ten years, during which time the people could have survived solely on the support of Elimelech.

71. See Zohar, *Ruth* 77; *Shabbos* 54b.

72. *Shoresh Yishai* on *Ruth* 1:1.

73. *Igeres Shemuel* on *Ruth* 1:5.

74. Zohar, *Ruth* 77.

75. See *Meishiv Nefesh* on *Ruth* 1:1, 5; *Igeres Shemuel* on *Ruth* 1:5, both of whom



parent reason his animals began to die. Every day, his horses, donkeys and camels dropped like flies until there were none left. It was as if a mysterious plague had sought out Elimelech's estate and devastated it while leaving the rest of Moav alone. Had he given even a little bit of thought to this strange development he would have realized that Hashem was rebuking him for leaving Eretz Yisrael. He should have reconsidered his actions and gone home to his people. Hashem gave him a reprieve, striking his animals instead of him, so there was still time for redemption. But Elimelech was determined to remain in Moav, and he stubbornly turned a deaf ear to the divine messages.

Shortly after the loss of all his livestock, Elimelech perished in a plague<sup>76</sup> that struck only the land of Moav.<sup>77</sup> Ironically, had he stayed in Eretz Yisrael, he would have survived. He had tried to save his wealth, but in the end, he lost his belongings and his life as well.<sup>78</sup> This most prominent of Jewish men, leader of his generation, died alone in a distant land, with no one beside him but his righteous wife, Naomi, and his two sons. There was no stately funeral procession, no solemn eulogies, no public displays of grief and mourning; just a sad, lonely man, newly impoverished,

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say that Elimelech died immediately upon entering Moav. There are differing versions in the Midrash regarding when Elimelech lost his wealth. Some *midrashim* state that it was during his lifetime, while others suggest that it was lost after he died as a warning to his children to return to Eretz Yisrael.

76. See *Tanchuma, Behar* 3; *Pesikta Rabbasi* 17; *Vayikra Rabbah* 17:4; *Ruth Rabbah* 2:10, 19; Malbim, *Igeres Shemuel, Ta'ama d'Kra* on *Ruth* 1:3. Despite the merits acquired by his father, Nachshon, Elimelech lost that protection when he left Eretz Yisrael (*Yalkut Shimoni, Ruth* 599; *Bava Basra* 91a). *Yalkut Shimoni, Ruth* 600, goes on to say that someone who is tightfisted with his money will eventually leave orphans.

77. *Ruth Rabbah* 2:19 with *Yefeh Anaf*.

78. Introduction of *Lekach Tov*, Gra on *Ruth* 1:5. In fact Megillas Ruth refers to him as nothing more than an *ish*, a simple commoner. This was to suggest that the move to Moav, instead of protecting Elimelech's money, caused him to lose both his fame and his wealth, leaving him an average, anonymous individual. See *Lekach Tov*, Malbim on *Ruth* 1:3; Gra on *Ruth* 1:5; *Ruth Rabbah, Pesichta* 6 with *Tiferes Tzion*.

a shadow of his former self, buried in a field far from his ancestral burial grounds.<sup>79</sup>

Yet the misery that had overtaken Elimelech and his family was the root of future redemption. Events were leading to the arrival of Ruth in the bosom of the Jewish nation. The seeds were being planted that would result in the emergence of the Davidic dynasty and the birth of Mashiach, the redeemer of the Jewish people.<sup>80</sup>

## A Family Conference

After Elimelech died, his family was left without guidance and direction. Naomi found herself a destitute widow, with neither friends nor social standing.<sup>81</sup> She had been pregnant when her husband died, but in the depths of her sorrow she miscarried, and this drove her into even deeper despair.<sup>82</sup> She became haggard and distraught, unrecognizable; a mere shell of her former self.<sup>83</sup> She realized that it was all well and good to be an obedient wife and defer to her husband, but under the circumstances she should have taken a stronger stand against the family's departure from Eretz Yisrael.<sup>84</sup> She could have persuaded him to stay,<sup>85</sup> and by her failure to act, this righteous woman had brought

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79. *Me'am Lo'ez*, *Nachalas Yaakov* on *Ruth* 1:3.

80. See Tur, *Targum*, *Eshkol haKofer*, Alshich on *Ruth* 1:1. See Ibn Yechiah for an opposing view.

81. *Toras Chesed*, *Igeres Shemuel* on *Ruth* 1:3. *Lekach Tov* says that Naomi was still wealthy but she was also a mourning, distraught widow. See Rambam in *Mishneh Torah*, *De'os* 6:10.

82. Tosafos on *Ruth* 1:3. See also Rashi on *Ruth* 1:21.

83. *Igeres Shemuel* on *Ruth* 1:3.

84. As the wife of Ohn ben Peles did to prevent him from participating in Korach's rebellion; see *Bamidbar Rabbah* 18:20.

85. Gra, *Eshkol haKofer*, *Igeres Shemuel*, *Ruth Zuta*, *Cheilek Bnei Yehudah* on *Ruth* 1:2. Rachav was able to save her family with her merits (see *Yehoshua* 2:18, 6:23), but Naomi couldn't save Elimelech, who had broken the hearts and spirits of his people (*Igeres Shemuel* on *Ruth* 1:3).

a measure of retribution upon herself and her children.<sup>86</sup>

With an effort Naomi pulled herself together and thought about the future. First of all, she resolved never to remarry. Despite his shortcomings Elimelech had been an honored man, and she was proud to have been his wife. She wanted to be associated with his memory for the rest of her life, and if she did not remarry she would always be known as Elimelech's widow.<sup>87</sup> Next, she considered her prospects and options. Should she and her sons stay in Moav or should they return to Eretz Yisrael? Naomi herself was inclined to abandon this ill-fated relocation and return to her homeland, but she would not go unless Machlon and Kilyon, her two sons, agreed to return with her.

"I have something important to discuss with you," she said to them one night. "Please sit down and listen carefully."

Machlon and Kilyon sat down and gave her their full attention.

"My sons," Naomi began, "your father brought us here to Moav because he felt it would improve our fortunes, but it has turned out to be a disaster. The loss of our wealth pales in comparison to the loss of my husband and your father. I believe that coming here was a grave mistake. Hashem is angry with us. I believe we should go home. We've had enough tragedy; we should not risk more."<sup>88</sup>

"But I like it here, Mother," said Machlon. "Why would I want to go back to a land where the people are starving?"

"I don't want to go back either," added Kilyon.<sup>89</sup>

"What is this?" exclaimed Naomi. "You two never get along.

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86. *Yalkut Shimoni, Ruth* 599. The same applied to Machlon and Kilyon. *Lekach Tov* says that as a family they were all stingy in supporting others. See also Ibn Yechiah. *Meishiv Nefesh* and *Eshkol haKofer* on *Ruth* 1:3 say that Naomi and her children did protest, and therefore survived.

87. *Igeres Shemuel* on *Ruth* 1:3.

88. Rokeach, Malbim on *ibid.*; Ibn Yechiah on *Ruth* 1:5.

89. *Meishiv Nefesh*, Malbim on *Ruth* 1:2.

If one of you says one thing, the other always has to say the opposite. And now you're both in agreement?"<sup>90</sup>

"Some things are more important than sibling rivalry," said Machlon. "It's not in our interest to go back to Eretz Yisrael."

"What do you like about this place?" asked Naomi. "I mean, we're penniless foreigners."

"Well," began Kilyon, "I feel welcome here. The people are warm and friendly to me. I enjoy the local culture: the festivals, the music, the dancing, the good wine and the camaraderie."

"And as for me," continued Machlon, "I feel that this is a land of opportunity for us. It's true that we're penniless, but we're still a famous aristocratic family.<sup>91</sup> The people here know who we are, and they treat us with deference and respect. In fact, I've heard from confidential sources that both of us are going to be offered high positions in the royal court."<sup>92</sup>

"Woe is me! I cannot believe what I'm hearing!" said Naomi. "When we came here, you two were righteous young men. Your father made every effort to provide an environment that would shield you from the influence of the immoral Moabites. And now you're talking about participating in the culture and taking positions in the government?"<sup>93</sup>

"You have to adapt to the times, Mother," said Kilyon. "This is our new home. We're still Jewish and we'll still follow the Torah. But sometimes you have to make compromises. Should we go back to starve with the Jewish people or should we stay here and prosper?"

"I say we should go home and starve," said Naomi. "At least we'd be where we belong. And do you think the famine will last forever? Have you forgotten how lush your father's estate in Beis

90. *Cheilek Bnei Yehudah* on Ruth 1:2; *Igeres Shemuel* on Ruth 1:5.

91. *Toras Chesed* on Ruth 1:3.

92. See Alshich, *Be'er Mayim* on Ruth 1:2.

93. Ibn Yechiah, Gra on *ibid.* See also *Chasam Sofer*.

Lechem is? It's yours if you return."

"It won't help us much now," said Kilyon. "That lush estate is not producing any crops at this time. And here our prospects are really good. You never know where things can lead."

Naomi narrowed her eyes and looked at him. "What do you mean?" she said sharply.

Kilyon shrugged and remained silent.

"I'll tell you, Mother," said Machlon.

Kilyon gave him a warning look. "Be quiet," he snapped.

"Why should I?" said Machlon. "Mother deserves to know."

"Know what?" said Naomi.

"There are rumors," said Machlon.

"What kind of rumors?"

"People are saying that King Eglon is interested in Kilyon."<sup>94</sup>

"Interested? What do you mean 'interested'?"

"I mean that Orpah, his older daughter, has taken a fancy to Kilyon, and King Eglon is considering letting them get married.<sup>95</sup> After all, the two of us are among the most eligible bachelors in Moav."<sup>96</sup>

Naomi was shocked. "Eligible bachelors? Married? How can you say such things? If your father were alive you wouldn't have even dared to hint at such a thing.<sup>97</sup> But now that you only have to contend with your poor, widowed mother, there's no reason

94. There is a dispute among the commentaries whether in fact Orpah was a daughter of Eglon or not. See commentary to *Lekach Tov*, *Igeres Shemuel*, Tosafos, *Meishiv Nefesh* on *Ruth* 1:4. Additionally, there is a question whether Eglon was alive altogether at the time his daughters married Machlon and Kilyon. Zohar, *Vayikra* 190a, explains that after Eglon's death Ruth was raised by her mother. See Vidal haTzorfasi and *Igeres Shemuel*, who hold that Ruth and Orpah were half sisters, daughters of Eglon from different mothers.

95. *Ruth Zuta*, *Chesed leMeshicho* on *Ruth* 1:4. *Meishiv Nefesh*, *ibid.*, remarks that it was a perfect marriage, as the Moabites were as miserly as they were.

96. See Alshich, *Be'er Mayim* on *Ruth* 1:2.

97. *Lekach Tov*, Rokeach, *Chesed leMeshicho* on *Ruth* 1:4. In fact, Elimelech himself was approached by the Moabites to marry one of them, but he refused (*Meishiv Nefesh* on *Ruth* 1:4).

not to seriously consider marrying Moabite women. My heart is breaking."<sup>98</sup>

"Don't get so upset, Mother," said Machlon. "Worse things can happen. We will take care of you in your old age. You'll have everything you need."

"Everything I need is back in Eretz Yisrael. I want to go back."

"And I don't," said Machlon.

"Nor do I," said Kilyon.

"You finally agree on something," Naomi muttered to herself bitterly.

"We're staying, Mother," said Machlon. "Will you stay with us?"

Naomi hung her head in sadness and sighed. "I'll stay," she said, her words barely audible.<sup>99</sup>

## Two Marriages

Not long afterward, Kilyon and Orpah were married<sup>100</sup> despite Naomi's objections,<sup>101</sup> and thus Kilyon became the son-in-law of King Eglon of Moav.<sup>102</sup> Orpah was a

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98. Mahari Kra, *Igeres Shemuel*, Rav Yosef Ya'avetz on *Ruth* 1:3. Alshich writes that on the contrary, Elimelech specifically went to Moav to build the legacy of Mashiach through marriage with the Moabites.

99. Ibn Yechiah on *Ruth* 1:4; *Igeres Shemuel* on *Ruth* 1:3. *Me'am Lo'ez* states that Naomi, like Elimelech, had a tradition that it would be through her children in Moav that Mashiach would be born. This is why she agreed to stay and eventually agreed to their marriages. See *Meishiv Nefesh*. Maharsha on *Bava Basra* 91a says that Machlon and Kilyon believed they would never return to Eretz Yisrael and therefore decided to marry Moabite women.

100. Alshich, *Meishiv Nefesh*, *Be'er Mayim*, *Eshkol haKofer*, Malbim, *Lechem Seta-rim* on *Ruth* 1:4. *Eshkol haKofer* mentions that Kilyon was the older brother and hence married first. See *Ta'anis* 11a, *Taz* on *Orach Chaim* 574, *Meishiv Nefesh* on *Ruth* 1:4, on whether it is permissible to marry during a famine; see also *Shoresh Yishai* on *Ruth* 4:9.

101. *Chesed leMeshicho* on *Ruth* 1:4.

102. See *Igeres Shemuel*, which suggests that there was no intention of this be-

nasty woman, but Kilyon was an ambitious man.<sup>103</sup> He wanted power, and this marriage would give it to him.

After the families were joined by this marriage, King Eglon cast his eye upon Machlon as a suitable husband for his younger daughter, who would be known in Jewish history as Ruth. Having gotten to know his brother's wife, Machlon hesitated before agreeing to the match.<sup>104</sup> But his powerful Moabite friends wore down his resistance. He could think of no reasonable excuse for declining the offer of a royal princess in marriage, and so he agreed to marry Ruth.<sup>105</sup>

The names of these two sisters give us many clues to their characters and personalities. Although the older sister's name was actually Harafah, she is known to us as Orpah, because she turned her *oref*, the back of her neck, to Naomi and stayed behind in Moav.<sup>106</sup> The word *oref* could also indicate that she was too stiff-necked to accept Judaism.<sup>107</sup> The younger sister, on the other hand, is known to us as רות, Ruth, because King David descended from her, who saturated (רוה) Hashem, so to speak, with songs of praise.<sup>108</sup> Her name also indicates that she perceived (ראתה)

ing a legal marriage; it was merely one for personal gratification only.

103. *Tiferes Tzion* on *Ruth Rabbah* 2:9. She was also a sorceress like other Moabite women (*Zohar, Ruth* 81b). In fact, this alone was grounds not to marry any Moabite woman (*Meishiv Nefesh* on *Ruth* 1:4).

104. Instead, he should have protested his brother's marriage from the beginning (*Malbim* on *Ruth* 1:4).

105. *Meishiv Nefesh* on *Ruth* 1:4.

106. *Ruth Rabbah* 2:9; *Sotah* 42b. Orpah made herself available to Moabite men, thus earning the reputation as a vile woman. As a consequence, she deserved to have her neck cut off similar to an *Eglah Arufah* (*Ruth Zuta* on 1:4).

107. *Zohar, Ruth* 77. The Hebrew letters in the name Orpah can also spell *peh ra*, "bad mouth," suggesting that she had a foul and sinful mouth, evident by the incantations she would utter while practicing the occult. This was made clear by the blasphemous comments toward Hashem made by her son Golias. See *Rokeach, Meishiv Nefesh* on *Ruth* 1:4; *Ben Yehoyada* on *Berachos* 7b. In contrast, Ruth would have a descendant who would use his mouth and voice to praise Hashem.

108. *Bava Basra* 14b; *Berachos* 7b; *Lekach Tov* on *Ruth* 1:5. Regarding whether

the righteousness of her mother-in-law and decided to stay by her side.<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, it hints that she was afraid (הִרְאָה) of sinning.<sup>110</sup> Finally, the Hebrew name Ruth spelled backwards is *tor*, turtledove, a kosher bird fit to be brought on the altar for the honor of Hashem.<sup>111</sup>

There is a difference of opinion among the commentators regarding the status of the two sisters in Jewish law. Some say they converted before Machlon and Kilyon married them; it was inconceivable that these formerly righteous young men would have strayed so far as to marry gentile women.<sup>112</sup> Others contend that they did not undergo ritual immersion and conversion,<sup>113</sup> because at the time it was not yet known that converted Moabite women could marry within the Jewish nation. Thus, they thought, con-

Ruth was her name before or after her conversion, see Zohar, *Ruth* 79a; *Eshkol haKofer* on *Ruth* 1:4, which maintain that she was called either Gilis, Gilonis or Plunisa. See Malbim on *Ruth* 1:4; *Gur Aryeh* on *Bereishis* 38:5. See also *Yad Yosef* on the festival of Shavuos. Maharsha (*Bava Basra* 14b) writes that the Gemara is answering why the Megillah is named after Ruth instead of Naomi.

109. *Ruth Rabbah* 2:9; *Lekach Tov* on *Ruth* 1:5.

110. Tosafos, *Lekach Tov* on *Ruth* 1:2, 4. See also Rokeach.

111. Zohar, *Ruth* 77–78; Rokeach on *Ruth* 1:4. Moreover, just as the sound a turtledove makes is unique from all other birds, Jews are unique in their praise to Hashem. See *Shelah*, *Hagahos l'Maseches Shavuos*, *Torah Ohr* 96 regarding the similarity between the names Yisro and Ruth. It should be noted that Yisro is the Torah's first documented male convert, while Ruth is the first documented female convert. (For more on Ruth's name, see Gra, *Iyun Yaakov*, *Ben Yehoyada* on *Berachos* 7b.)

112. Zohar, *Ruth* 180, 182; Ibn Ezra on *Ruth* 1:2. See *Mo'adim uZemanim* 4:316 for a lengthy discussion on this topic. See also Zohar, *Balak* 190a, which maintains that consistent with what is written in *Yevamos* 47b, Ruth converted on her way to Eretz Yisrael.

113. Maharsha on *Bava Basra* 91a; *Ruth Rabbah* 2:9; *Targum* on *Ruth* 1:5; Rashi on *Ruth* 1:12; Malbim on *Ruth* 1:4. Ruth was a modest and exceptional woman. Had she been told to convert she would have done so (*Tiferes Tzion*).

Had the sisters converted it would be difficult to explain how Naomi would suggest that they return to Moav (*Yefeh Anaf*). *Chesed leMeshicho* on *Ruth* 1:4 mentions that Machlon and Kilyon sought to remain in the Moabites' good graces, which they would have been unable to do had their wives converted.



version would not have permitted their marriage anyway.<sup>114</sup> Still others point out that even if the sisters did undergo a private conversion process, it would not have been valid. For one thing, conversion requires a *beis din*, and there was certainly none in Moav.<sup>115</sup> In addition, conversion for ulterior motives, such as the desire to marry a Jew, is not valid.<sup>116</sup>

Naomi did not consider Orpah and Ruth Jewish. Mortified by the marriage of her sons to gentile women, she disowned them,<sup>117</sup> but she remained in Moav nonetheless. She was not prepared to sever all ties with them.<sup>118</sup> Perhaps she hoped that they would repent and return to Eretz Yisrael with her.

Machlon and Kilyon did not return to Eretz Yisrael. They enjoyed their status in Moav, and even if they had wanted to return, their wives would have objected to leaving their royal family and privileges behind.<sup>119</sup>

Ten years passed, and the situation did not change.<sup>120</sup> Machlon and Kilyon were the sons-in-law of the king, princes of the land, and Naomi, their mother, sat at home in bereavement.

114. See *Ruth Rabbah* 2:9 with Mahrzu; *Igeres Shemuel* on *Ruth* 1:4. Actually, conversion would have downgraded their sin to “only” the transgression of living with a woman out of wedlock. See *Igeres Shemuel*.

115. *Igeres Shemuel* on *Ruth* 1:3. See commentary to *Lekach Tov*, *Ruth* 1:4.

116. See Zohar, *Ruth* 79; *Meishiv Nefesh* on *Ruth* 1:4. See commentary to *Lekach Tov*, *Ruth* 1:4. Ruth would eventually convert with no other motive than to cling to Hashem. See Rambam in *Mishneh Torah*, *Isurei Biah* 13:14–15.

117. *Chesed leMeshicho* on *Ruth* 1:4.

118. *Igeres Shemuel* on *Ruth* 1:3.

119. *Ibid.*, 1:4.

120. *Ibid.*; *Ruth Rabbah* 2:9. This was calculated from the family’s departure from Eretz Yisrael. *Chomas Anach*, however, maintains that they were married for ten years. *Me’am Lo’ez* adds that considering they had been married for ten years and didn’t yet have children, they should have divorced. When Hashem saw that they didn’t, He punished them with death. See Rav Vidal haTzorfas.

## Retribution and Atonement

During all this time, Hashem waited patiently for Machlon and Kilyon to have a change of heart. Although He had taken Elimelech from this world because of his sins, He took into consideration that Machlon and Kilyon had not come to Moav on their own volition, and thus allowed them to remain alive. He would give them the time and opportunity to repent and return to their people so that they wouldn't suffer their father's fate.<sup>121</sup>

Hashem also sent the brothers a message similar to the one He sent Elimelech. When their livestock died of a mysterious plague, they should have recognized the message and realized its significance.<sup>122</sup> Hashem also decreed that they should remain childless as retribution for their actions.<sup>123</sup> But like their father before them, they turned a deaf ear<sup>124</sup> to the divine messages and continued down the path they had chosen to tread. It was clear that they had laid down roots in Moabite society and had no intention of ever leaving their gentile wives and their royal status.<sup>125</sup> And they certainly would not return to Eretz Yisrael with their wives and face scorn and ostracism from the populace.<sup>126</sup>

The names Machlon and Kilyon tell us much about them and

121. Ibn Yechiah on *Ruth* 1:4.

122. See *Tanchuma, Behar* 3; *Pesikta Rabbasi* 17; *Vayikra Rabbah* 17:4; *Ruth Rabbah* 2:10; Malbim, *Igeres Shemuel, Ta'ama d'Kra*, Rashi on *Ruth* 1:3, 5.

123. *Toras Chesed* on *Ruth* 1:5. *Ruth Rabbah* 7:14 remarks that Ruth was barren, incapable of having children without miraculous intervention. Eventually, when she married Boaz, she did have a child.

124. See *Tanchuma, Behar* 3; *Pesikta Rabbasi* 17; *Vayikra Rabbah* 17:4; *Ruth Rabbah* 2:10; Rashi, *Shoresh Yishai* on *Ruth* 1:5.

125. See *Tanchuma, Behar* 3; *Targum* on *Ruth* 1:5.

126. *Eshkol haKofer* on *Ruth* 1:3; *Igeres Shemuel, Cheilek Bnei Yehudah* on *Ruth* 1:2. Machlon and Kilyon would have been better off suffering shame in this world so that they wouldn't have to face shame in the next world. Instead, they died with their sins and would have to face the consequences on their day of judgment. This view differs from that of the *Meishiv Nefesh*, which maintains that their deaths atoned for their sins.

their fall in Torah observance. Machlon had previously been called Yo'ash, implying that he had despaired (*ye'ush*) of salvation. Afterward he was called Machlon, hinting that he had profaned himself (*chilul*) by leaving Eretz Yisrael and marrying a Moabite woman. His name also implied that it would be temporarily erased (*yi-macheh*) from the annals of the Jewish people.<sup>127</sup>

Kilyon was once called Saraf, hinting that he had burned (*saraf*) a law of the Torah. Afterward he was called Kilyon, implying that his name was eradicated (*kalah*) from memory.<sup>128</sup> The brothers were called "the men of Kozeva," implying that they lied to themselves (*kazvu*) regarding the cause of their father's death,<sup>129</sup> and were thereby punished by childlessness.<sup>130</sup>

After ten years Hashem decided that He had been patient with the two brothers long enough.<sup>131</sup> Machlon and Kilyon died<sup>132</sup> in a

127. See Rokeach, who says that the name Machlon is related to the word *machalah* ("sickness"), in that he became spiritually sick. Eventually his sins would be forgiven because of the child his wife Ruth would bear after his death (Zohar, *Ruth* 77; *Yalkut Shimoni*, *Ruth* 600; *Ruth Zuta* on *Ruth* 2; *Lekach Tov*; Tosafos).

128. See Rashbam, Maharsha on *Bava Basra* 91a; *Ruth Rabbah* 2:4, 5; *Igeres Shemuel* on *Ruth* 1:5; *I Divrei haYamim* 4:22 with *Targum*. *Meishiv Nefesh* on *Ruth* 1:5 says that these names were given to them after they died.

129. *Ruth Rabbah* 2:4 with *Tiferes Tzion*; Malbim on *Ruth* 1:3.

130. See *Ruth Rabbah* 2:4; *I Divrei haYamim* 4:22.

131. See *Igeres Shemuel* on *Ruth* 1:4–5. See Maharsha on *Bava Basra* 91a. *Cheilek Bnei Yehudah* on *Ruth* 1:2 states that the brothers should have prayed for the famine to end.

132. According to Malbim, *Eshkol haKofer* on *Ruth* 1:5, Machlon died first. *Igeres Shemuel* on *Ruth* 4:9 and *Meishiv Nefesh* on *Ruth* 1:4, 4:9, write that Kilyon died first. Much of this dispute revolves around an opinion that at one point Kilyon married Ruth and died, after which Machlon married her through the process of *yibum*. *Igeres Shemuel* suggests the opposite: Ruth was first married to Machlon, and after he died married Kilyon. See also *Simchas haRegel*; *Chasam Sofer*. Although Kilyon was the first to sin, Machlon died before him because he failed to protest Kilyon's marriage to Orpah. However, because Kilyon was first to marry, he would have no lasting memory to his lineage. Machlon, on the other hand, would have the merit of his wife being the forebear of King David and, thus, Mashiach.

plague<sup>133</sup> on the very same day.<sup>134</sup> Elimelech, Machlon and Kilyon were essentially good people who erred and eventually strayed into transgression, but divine retribution mandated they be punished, and their deaths atoned for their sins.<sup>135</sup>

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133. *Ruth Rabbah* 2:19.

134. *Igeres Shemuel* on *Ruth* 1:5.

135. *Meishiv Nefesh*, Gra on *ibid*. See Ibn Yechiah on *Ruth* 4:9. Some commentators add that Machlon was actually a good man, as his name is also related to the word *mehilah*, which means forgiveness (*Igeres Shemuel*, Rav Elisha Galico on *Ruth* 4:9).