

# Naomi and Ruth Bible Study Script

## “I Lift My Eyes to the Hills”

### Naomi’s Pilgrimage

A Study of Psalm 121 and The Book of Ruth

#### Slide #1: Introduction: Psalm 121

Good morning!

This Bible study will center around the lives of two women – Naomi and Ruth. Today we are going to look at two different Scriptural teachings. The first is from Psalm 121 and the other will be a study about Naomi from The Book of Ruth.

**“I lift up my eyes to the hills  
Where does my help come from?  
My help comes from the LORD,  
The Maker of heaven and earth.**

What is it about mountains that cause us to reflect on the wonder and power of God? Even if you didn’t grow up near mountains, you can understand the concept of looking up to the hills as you talk with God.

Psalm 121 is an inspired Hebrew prayer and/ or musical poem. The specific author and date for this psalm are unknown. Some Psalms go all the way back to Moses. This Psalm is described as a pilgrimage song that might have been sung as a dialogue between individuals in a caravan.

#### Slide #2:

The other Scriptural teaching for this Bible study will center on the life of Naomi in The Book of Ruth. Naomi and Ruth found themselves on a pilgrimage from the Plains of Moab to the Hills of Bethlehem. Bethlehem during those days was a community that had remained faithful to the LORD, and we know that it will become the birthplace of Jesus.

Let’s read Psalm 121. This Psalm consists of synonymous parallelism in which the second line always reinforces the first line. Notice the repetition of key terms “The Lord” and “Watch Over.” Let’s read.

**I lift up my eyes to the hills  
Where does my help come from?  
My help comes from the LORD,  
The Maker of heaven and earth.**

**He will not let your foot slip -  
He who watches over you will not slumber;  
Indeed, he who watches over Israel  
Will neither slumber nor sleep.**

**Slide #3:**

**The LORD watches over you -  
The LORD is your shade at your right hand;  
The sun will not harm you by day,  
Nor the moon by night.**

**The LORD will keep you from all harm -  
He will watch over your life;  
The LORD will watch over your coming and going  
Both now and forevermore.”**

**Slide #4:**

This morning we are going to take a look at Naomi who found herself “lifting her eyes to the hills” of Bethlehem and seeking help from the LORD. The Book of Ruth starts and ends with Naomi – not Ruth. Since this is a lengthy story, I will tell parts of the story, and we will read specific verses.

**The Setting** begins in Moab. Naomi’s family (husband Elimelek and sons Mahlon and Kiilion) had moved to Moab from Bethlehem about 10 years earlier due to a famine in Judah. Naomi’s sons married Moabite women – Orpah and Ruth – even though such intermarriage was forbidden in the Jewish culture. Tragedy struck. Naomi’s husband and two sons died.

**The Characters** in this story are Naomi, Orpah, Ruth, and Boaz (who will enter the story later)

Naomi found herself alone as a widow in a foreign country with two Moabite daughters-in-law. She decided to go back to Bethlehem, her hometown known for faithfulness to the LORD. Both daughters-in-law volunteered to go with Naomi, but she told both to remain in their own country. Naomi lamented in Ruth 1: 11,

**“Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me – even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons – would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD’s hand has turned against me!”**

Orpah cried and then kissed Naomi goodbye, but Ruth clung to Naomi. When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging Ruth to return to Moab. (Notice that I left out Ruth's famous "Wither thou goest" verse. This study is about Naomi – not Ruth. We'll look at Ruth's verse later.)

I'm amazed at the loyalty that Orpah and Ruth showed to Naomi. Why? Some commentaries believe that Naomi was such a godly woman that Orpah and Ruth were willing to follow her anywhere, and Ruth was even willing to follow Naomi's God.

**Slide #5:**

**Heartbreak:** So Naomi and Ruth went on until they came to Bethlehem. The whole town stirred at their arrival, and the women gathered around Naomi and asked, "**Can this be Naomi?**" Here is Naomi's reply...

**"Don't call me Naomi. Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me"** (Ruth 1: 20-21).

Climb into Naomi's heart. What do you see there? Think of all the ways you might describe Naomi based on these scriptural passages and your own experiences as a woman.

The name "Naomi" means "pleasant," but she had changed. She called herself "Mara" which means "bitter." Consider the losses that Naomi had experienced – death of a spouse, death of sons, loss of livelihood, separation from family, a foreign culture, aging, and loss of identity.

Let's look at three interpretations of Naomi's words.

**Interpretation #1. "Call me Bitter." Naomi was overly dramatic. Naomi wanted sympathy from her old friends. She had a tendency to look at the negative.**

Was Naomi being overly dramatic to get attention from her old friends, the women of Bethlehem? Was Naomi being a "drama queen?" Studies show that women have a much larger network of friends than men have. Naomi had been gone for 10 long years, and I imagine that she longed to see her friends again. Can you picture this group of women surrounding Naomi to hear her story?

Naomi was experiencing the greatest stressors in life. Can you imagine Naomi's relief to be able to pour out her story to her old friends in Bethlehem?

I wonder if Naomi (Remember, her name means "pleasant") really had a tendency toward the negative? Her statement **"I went away full, but the Lord has brought me**

**back empty**” is pretty negative. But isn’t it true? What positive things did she have? Well, she had Ruth, who certainly seemed to love her greatly.

**Interpretation #2. “Call me Bitter.” Naomi was guilt-ridden. Her family disobeyed God by intermarrying Moabites.**

Guilt can be unbearable. Was Naomi feeling guilty for leaving Bethlehem and allowing her sons to intermarry with women of Moab? Was Ruth a burden? Wouldn’t it have been easier for Naomi to return to Bethlehem without Ruth, who was a constant reminder of her family’s guilt? Do you think Naomi was worrying, “What will they think?” Will Naomi be an outcast, because she brought a Moabite daughter-in-law to Bethlehem with her?

**Interpretation #3. “Call me bitter.” Naomi was sour and desperate. Naomi blamed God for her troubles.**

Had Naomi reached the point of desperation? Despair is one of the most deadly of emotions. Had Naomi lost all sense of hope? Did she blame God for her troubles instead of seeing Him as the ultimate hope?

As I look at Naomi’s words, I see her on the brink of despair. Yes, she had Ruth’s support, but I suspect that she found Ruth to be an added burden at this desperate time in her life.

**Slide #6:**

Let’s take a moment for discussion. Turn to your neighbor and consider the following question.

**Tell of a time in your life when there was great heartbreak or despair.  
How did your help come from the LORD?**

**Slide #7:**

**HARDSHIP:** Let’s look at Ruth Chapter 2. It appears that Naomi’s friends and distant relatives left Naomi and Ruth to fend for themselves, so Ruth volunteered to glean leftover grain in the fields. As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Naomi’s deceased husband, Elimelek. Here is where Boaz enters the story. It’s obvious from the very beginning that he was a faithful man. He greeted the harvesters with the words, “The LORD be with you.” And the harvesters replied, “The LORD bless you.”

What a wonderful greeting! Boaz noticed Ruth in the fields and asked about her. He found out that Ruth was the daughter-in-law of Naomi, his distant relative. He gave Ruth permission to glean in his fields and instructed his men not to lay a hand on her. Obviously, even in Bethlehem, these were dangerous times for single women.

What was Naomi thinking as she waited for Ruth's return? Climb into Naomi's heart. Think of all the ways you might describe Naomi's thoughts and feelings as she waited to hear about Ruth's success or failure to get food. How are you at waiting? Do you find yourself worrying about all kinds of made up scenarios in your mind? It's not surprising that when Ruth came back from the field, Naomi started with the inquisition,

**“Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who took notice of you”** (Ruth 2:19).

Can you imagine Naomi's relief as Ruth shared the large portion of grain that she had gleaned due to Boaz's kindness? Then came Naomi's words of advice:

**“It will be good for you, my daughter, to go with (Boaz's) girls, because in someone else's field you might be harmed”** (Ruth 2:22).

What do you think about Naomi's comments to Ruth? Let's consider three interpretations.

**Interpretation #1. Naomi was meddlesome and overprotective. “Where did you glean today? Where did you work?”**

**Interpretation #2. Naomi was concerned and wise. She assumed responsibility for Ruth's safety and well-being.**

Was Naomi beginning to show an interest and take responsibility for Ruth? Remember that Naomi had gone back to Bethlehem, where she had relatives. However, it certainly didn't look like her relatives were doing much to help Naomi and Ruth. Had Naomi reached a point where she knew that she needed to take responsibility?

According to one source, today “70 per cent of the world's poor are women. The majority of the 1.5 billion people living on \$1 a day or less are women.” “Worldwide, women on average earn slightly more than 50 per cent of what men are earning.” (In the U.S. it's about 76%.) The gap between men and women caught in the cycle of poverty has continued to widen in recent years.

According to the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, women living in poverty are often denied access to critical resources such as credit, land, and inheritance. (Does this sound like Naomi's experience?)

**Interpretation #3. Naomi was showing a change in attitude by expressing new hope, and this is a turning point in the story.**

Instead of “bitterness” and despair, she showed a renewed interest in Ruth's well-being, and she expressed some hope that a Godly man, namely Boaz, would eventually come to their aid.

## Slide #8: Humiliation

**Naomi said, “My daughter, should I not try to find a home for you, where you will be well provided for? Is not Boaz a kinsman of ours? Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. Wash and perfume yourself, and put on your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don’t let him know you are there... When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do” (Ruth 3:1-4).**

Climb into Naomi’s heart. What do you see there? Think of the advice that she gives to Ruth. What humiliation might she feel as she suggests Ruth’s visit to Boaz at the threshing floor?

What do you think about Naomi’s advice to Ruth? Let’s consider three interpretations.

**Interpretation #1. Naomi was bold and reckless. She gambled with Ruth’s safety in order to provide for her future.**

Does Naomi realize what she was asking Ruth to do? Lying at Boaz’s feet was a symbol of complete surrender. Was Naomi that “hard” and “earthy” that she would gamble with Ruth’s safety like that? Or... Did Naomi know Boaz well enough that she knew he could be trusted? Was this the only option that Naomi and Ruth had left?

**Interpretation #2. Naomi was manipulative. She used Ruth’s beauty to seduce Boaz.**

Was Boaz that dense that it would take an action like this for Ruth to get his attention? In those days, was sex appeal a woman’s only asset? Is it much different than today? Check out our television commercials, magazines, and popular movies. Are women still reduced to using the tools of sex to gain attention?

**Interpretation #3. Naomi was wise and knowledgeable. She understood the customs, and her integrity was never in doubt.**

I can still remember this part of the story that was told to me in Sunday School. Even as a child, I knew something was strange about this story. I remember that my teacher said, “Oh... This is just something that women did back in those days. It was their custom.”

As a grown woman, I now understand the dire straits that Naomi and Ruth were in for Naomi to give these directions to Ruth.

## Slide #9: HELP: Ruth’s Story

It is impossible to tell the story of Naomi without looking at Ruth’s contributions.

**Ruth said to Naomi, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me... ( Ruth 1:16-17).**

And in Chapter 3, Ruth carefully listens to Naomi’s advice and says, **“I will do whatever you say.”**

Climb into **Ruth’s** heart. What do you see there? Naomi told her at least three times to abandon her and go back to Moab, but Ruth continued to follow Naomi. Why did Ruth stay with Naomi? What motivated Ruth to show this unwavering trust in Naomi? Here are three interpretations.

**Interpretation #1. Ruth was impulsive and spontaneous. In her youth, she felt the stir of excitement and adventure in new challenges and surroundings.**

In our 21<sup>st</sup> Century “soap opera” world, Ruth must have had an ulterior motive to follow Naomi to a strange country and give up her own gods so quickly. She certainly must have wanted to “get out of Dodge” or in this case, Moab. Perhaps, there is more to this story as to why Ruth was so eager to follow Naomi to Bethlehem and not look back.

**Interpretation #2. Ruth was naïve and indecisive. She was overly dependent on Naomi and unable to think for herself.**

Perhaps, in 21<sup>st</sup> Century “psycho babble,” Ruth had latent dependency needs, and she attached those needs to Naomi.

**Interpretation #3. Ruth was faithful and devoted. Her loyalty to Naomi marked a pure and selfless devotion.**

This is what I was taught in Sunday school. Ruth knew what a godly woman Naomi had been in Moab, and she became devoted to Naomi and Naomi’s God. Naomi had become Ruth’s mentor. Ruth made the strongest statement of all, when she said that she wanted to be buried where Naomi is buried. Naomi was Ruth’s mentor.

**Slide #10:**

Let’s take a moment for discussion. Turn to your neighbor and consider the following questions:

- 1. What women in your life served as Christian mentors for you? Tell your story.**
- 2. What are the most important lessons that you could share as a mentor?**
- 3. What are some questions or needs that you might have for a mentor?**

Women in our church today repeatedly say that they would like to have mentors. They are looking for authentic, accepting, and real relationships with wiser, experienced Christian women who would care about them. It's not done through meetings, rules, and regulations, but it's done in a way that a friend accepts and helps a friend.

**Slide #11:**

Naomi's advice to Ruth worked. Ruth went to the threshing floor and lay at the feet of Boaz. When he awoke, he found Ruth at his feet. Boaz was touched by her "kindness." He said, "**The LORD bless you, my daughter... I will do for you all you ask. All the people of my town know that you are a woman of noble character. Although it is true that I am a family guardian, there is another who is more closely related than I. Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to do his duty as your family guardian, good; let him redeem you. But if he is not willing, as surely as the LORD lives, I will do it.**" So... Ruth lay at his feet until morning, but got up before anyone could be recognized; and he said, "**no one must know that a woman came to the threshing floor.**"

Naomi had been right. Boaz protected Ruth's virtue, and Ruth returned to Naomi. Naomi asked, "**How did it go, my daughter?**" Why doesn't this question seem like an inquisition anymore?

Ruth told Naomi about the night's events, and once again, Naomi shared her wisdom and said, "**Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today.**"

Naomi certainly seemed to know Boaz! Meanwhile Boaz went to the town gate and sat down just as the family guardian he had mentioned came along. Plus, Boaz invited 10 of the town elders to listen to the discussion. Boaz brought to the guardian's attention that Naomi was selling the piece of land that had belonged to her husband, and the guardian had first "dibs." However, if he bought the land, he would also acquire Ruth, the Moabite, the dead man's widow. The family guardian balked and said that he could not do that. So the family guardian took off his sandal and gave it to Boaz to seal the deal, and Boaz, the next in line, could buy the land and acquire Ruth.

**Slide #12:**

**HOPE:** So... Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. Ruth gave birth to a son.

Now, it's time for celebration. Naomi's "fair weather friends," the women of Bethlehem, appeared in the story again, and they said to Naomi, "**Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth... Naomi has a son.**"

What do these women's words mean? Here are three interpretations:

**Interpretation #1. Naomi's future was secure. She had a male heir to take care of her.**

This statement is certainly true in this story. Almost all of a woman's worth was dependent on male protection. A male heir served as an insurance policy for a woman's future in that time and place.

**Interpretation #2. In old age, a daughter or daughter -in-law is better than seven sons.**

This statement also seems to be quite true. Even in today's world, those of us in the "sandwich generation" find that grown daughters tend to assume a lot of the responsibility for an aging parent.

**Interpretation #3. The ultimate meaning for this story is Jesus, the descendent of Ruth who fulfills the prophecy and offers salvation.**

This statement is also very true. They named the child "Obed." He was the father of Jesse, the father of David. It would be from David's line in Bethlehem that Jesus would be born.

**Slide #13:**

**HOPE:** Can you picture Naomi as she held baby Obed in her arms? Have you had such an experience in your family?

The conclusion in the Book of Ruth balances the introduction. In Hebrew both have the same number of words, and both focus on Naomi. The introduction emphasizes Naomi's emptiness, and the conclusion portrays her fullness.

**Slide #14: HOPE**

As Naomi looked to the hills of Bethlehem, she had no idea that the Messiah eventually would come from Ruth's descendents. These are the same hills where Jesus, our Savior, was born.

Hills were important locations during Jesus' ministry. It was on a hill where Jesus resisted Satan's temptation. (Matt. 4: 8-10) It was on a hill where Jesus revealed Himself in the Transfiguration. (Mark 9: 2-13) It was from a hill where Jesus gave His Sermon on the Mount. (Matt. 5-7) Most importantly, "there is a green hill far away" that holds great meaning for us as Christians. It is the hill of Calvary where Jesus was crucified for our sin.

This is not the end of the story. After Jesus' resurrection, He took His disciples to a hill in Galilee. There He gave His Great Commission, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:18-20).

**Slide #15:**

Psalm 121 stands as a song for believers today as we continue our pilgrimage through life until we reach our heavenly home. Let's once again read Psalm 121

**I lift up my eyes to the hills  
Where does my help come from?  
My help comes from the LORD,  
The Maker of heaven and earth.**

**He will not let your foot slip -  
He who watches over you will not slumber;  
Indeed, he who watches over Israel  
Will neither slumber nor sleep.**

**Slide #16:**

**The LORD watches over you -  
The LORD is your shade at your right hand;  
The sun will not harm you by day,  
Nor the moon by night.**

**The LORD will keep you from all harm -  
He will watch over your life;  
The LORD will watch over your coming and going  
Both now and forevermore."**