

Who was Elimelech in the Bible?

Elimelech (also spelled Elimelek) was the husband of Naomi and the father of two sons, Mahlon and Kilion. Elimelech was of the tribe of Judah. He lived in Bethlehem during the time of the judges.

A famine was ravaging the land, and so Elimelech moved his family away from Israel to the country of Moab so they would be fed (Ruth 1:1-2). While this was a decision made out of a desire for survival, Moab was not the best place for Elimelech to take his family. He was leaving the Promised Land that God had given him, and the Moabites did not worship the Lord. The danger was that Israelites living among other nations might begin to assimilate into the foreign culture and imitate its religious practices, thus breaking the Law of God. While in Moab, Elimelech died, leaving his wife with their two sons (verse 3). The sons married Moabite women, which was something else God wanted His people to avoid. However, God ended up blessing Elimelech's family anyway, although not through his sons. God instead chose to work through Naomi and one of her Moabite daughters-in-law, Ruth.

After only ten years in Moab, Elimelech's sons also died. The Bible did not say how this happened, but the household was now comprised of three widows. Naomi heard that the famine in Judah had ended and food was now available in Bethlehem (Ruth 1:6), so she determined to return. She urged her daughters-in-law to stay in Moab, but Ruth refused, proclaiming that Naomi's God was now her own God (verse 16). The two women went to Bethlehem and began to make a living for themselves. One of Elimelech's relatives, a man named Boaz, owned a field in Bethlehem, so Ruth went to his field to glean the leftover grain in order to feed herself and Naomi (Ruth 2:1-2). Ruth caught Boaz's eye, and the two eventually married.

In spite of the fact that Elimelech's family intermarried with pagans, God used the situation for His glory. Ruth and Boaz became the parents of Obed, who would become the father of Jesse, the father of David (Ruth 4:17). As the Messiah was descended from David (Romans 1:3; see also Matthew 1), Elimelech's family was blessed to be a part of Jesus' line.