

## *Naomi's Story*

Ruth 1:1-18 (October 31, 2021)

### ***Ruth 1:1-18***

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons. <sup>2</sup>The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. <sup>3</sup>But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. <sup>4</sup>These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. When they had lived there about ten years, <sup>5</sup>both Mahlon and Chilion also died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

<sup>6</sup>Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the Lord had considered his people and given them food. <sup>7</sup>So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah. <sup>8</sup>But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go back each of you to your mother’s house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. <sup>9</sup>The Lord grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband.” Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud. <sup>10</sup>They said to her, “No, we will return with you to your people.” <sup>11</sup>But Naomi said, “Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? <sup>12</sup>Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, <sup>13</sup>would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the Lord has turned against me.” <sup>14</sup>Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. <sup>15</sup>So she said, “See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.” <sup>16</sup>But Ruth said, “Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; Where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. <sup>17</sup>Where you die, I will die— there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!” <sup>18</sup>When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

### ***Historical Context***

Ruth is one of the few places in the male-dominated world of Scripture where women play the major roles and are the central characters. They must make their way amidst the men and the male-dominated world of ancient Israel, but the emphasis is squarely on the women.

### ***Theme: Naomi's Story***

To read the book of Ruth as Naomi’s story is to read a story of grace that holds space for grief and doubt without condemnation, that doesn’t try to “fix” it. When we see grief and anger—particularly when that anger is directed towards God—we “cling” (Hebrew *dabaq*; 1:14) to the “you’ll be fine” and the “things will get better soon” dismissals. We try to extinguish the fiery rage of anger that grief brings—eager to put out the flames of the “unfairness” of it all. Naomi’s story doesn’t stifle the flame; it accepts the grief, the anger, the complaint. Naomi’s story holds those feelings even as it moves forward.

As the book progresses, Naomi's perspective never changes. Even after Ruth's commitment, Naomi's silence on the road (1:18) indicates that she still carries her grief and frustration.

Her silence at the end of the narrative is most telling. We frequently encounter stories of struggle, loss, and redemption in the Bible that often end with the main characters repenting for their doubts, giving thanks, and praising God (for example, Job 42:1–6; Psalms 6; 13; 22). At the end of this story, Naomi remains silent. Naomi's story is one that meets people where they are.