

## RUTH 1

**1** In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. <sup>2</sup>The man's name was Elimelek, his wife's name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.

<sup>3</sup>Now Elimelek, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. <sup>4</sup>They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, <sup>5</sup>both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

<sup>6</sup>When Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. <sup>7</sup>With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah. <sup>8</sup>Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the Lord show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. <sup>9</sup>May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband." Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud <sup>10</sup>and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people."

<sup>11</sup>But Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? <sup>12</sup>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— <sup>13</sup>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!"

<sup>14</sup>At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her. <sup>15</sup>"Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her." <sup>16</sup>But Ruth replied, "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. <sup>17</sup>Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me." <sup>18</sup>When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

<sup>19</sup>So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, "Can this be Naomi?" <sup>20</sup>"Don't call me Naomi," she told them. "Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. <sup>21</sup>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."

<sup>22</sup>So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.

## What love looks like

The famous “love” passage in 1 Corinthians 13 gives us a definition of godly love. ▶

Using the keywords in this passage as a guideline, mark Ruth’s story as we go along with your own notes on how the key people (Naomi, Ruth, Boaz) demonstrate godly love.

### 1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-7

<sup>4</sup>Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. <sup>5</sup>It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. <sup>6</sup>Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup>It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

## Chapter 1: “Love’s Resolve”

There is some disagreement about whether Elimelek’s family had done wrong in moving to Moab and intermarrying with the locals. Deuteronomy explicitly forbids intermarriage with the non-Israelite inhabitants of the land. ▼

### DEUTERONOMY 7:1-4A

<sup>1</sup>When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations—the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, nations larger and stronger than you— <sup>2</sup>and when the Lord your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy. <sup>3</sup>Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, <sup>4</sup>for they will turn your children away from following me to serve other gods...

Some scholars point out that Moabites are not specifically mentioned in verse 1, but a reading of the passage suggests that the list is not exhaustive, and that one of the primary concerns about intermarriage relates to its power to turn Israelites away from God.

As the book of Ruth unfolds, it becomes apparent that this was a godly family. Perhaps they made a moral error in intermarrying, but this is a redemption story demonstrating what God can do, even with our mistakes. Ruth does not become a harmful influence, instead she has learned of the true God in Naomi’s household, and she chooses to turn away from everything else to hold onto this family and this faith.

Naomi cannot provide for her daughters-in-law. She wants them to find safety and the joys of motherhood and knows that she is powerless to bring these things about. It is noticeable that she does not even mention the possibility of a levirate marriage when she is urging Orpah and Ruth to return to Moab. Likely this is because she is aware that redemption is unlikely for them since Israelites are forbidden to marry foreigners.

When the women return to Bethlehem, Naomi’s misery is obvious. And although Naomi is discouraged and disheartened, her faith in God is not broken, as we shall see in later chapters.



“NAOMI AND RUTH,” HAROLD COPPING, 1927