

The Woman Who
Wouldn't Let Go—
Ruth



Ruth 1:1–22

In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. ² 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. ³ But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. ⁴ These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years, ⁵ and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

⁶ Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the LORD had visited his people and given them food. ⁷ So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. ⁸ But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. ⁹ The LORD grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!" Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. ¹⁰ And they said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people."

¹¹ But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? ¹² Turn back, my daughters; go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, ¹³ would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the LORD has gone out against me." ¹⁴ Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

¹⁵ And she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law."
¹⁶ But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. ¹⁷ Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you." ¹⁸ And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.

¹⁹ So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women said, "Is this Naomi?" ²⁰ She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. ²¹ I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the LORD has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?"

²² So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

The Book of Ruth opens in Bethlehem in Judah during the time of the Judges, then moves to Moab.

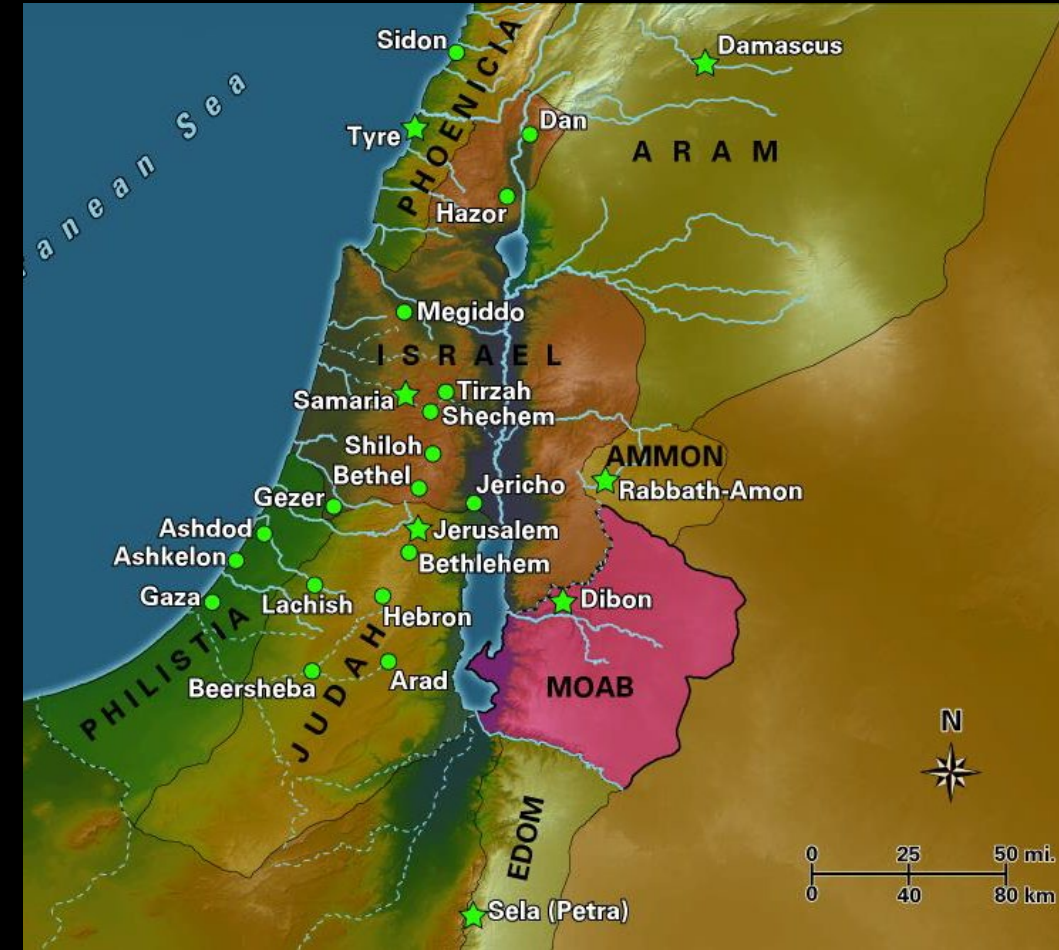
It was a chaotic and dangerous time to start with—one of the most difficult in Israel's history.

There was armed conflict with the Philistines who were encroaching on their land.

For Israel it was a time of idolatry and moral confusion.

Judges 17:6 — “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”

Ruth and Elimelech move to Moab to escape a famine. Moabites are sometimes enemies and sometimes hostile neighbors of Israel.



Scene 1—Things go from bad to worse.

After the family moves to Moab, Ruth's husband Elimelech dies.

Her sons Mahlon and Chilion marry Ruth and Orpah.

Mahlon and Chilion die, leaving a household with three widows.

Ruth 1:5

"And both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband."

In the opening scene of Ruth, things go from bad to worse. Naomi trades a famine for three funerals.



Scene 2: Ruth pledges her loyalty to Naomi.

News from Bethlehem: “the Lord had visited his people and given them food.”

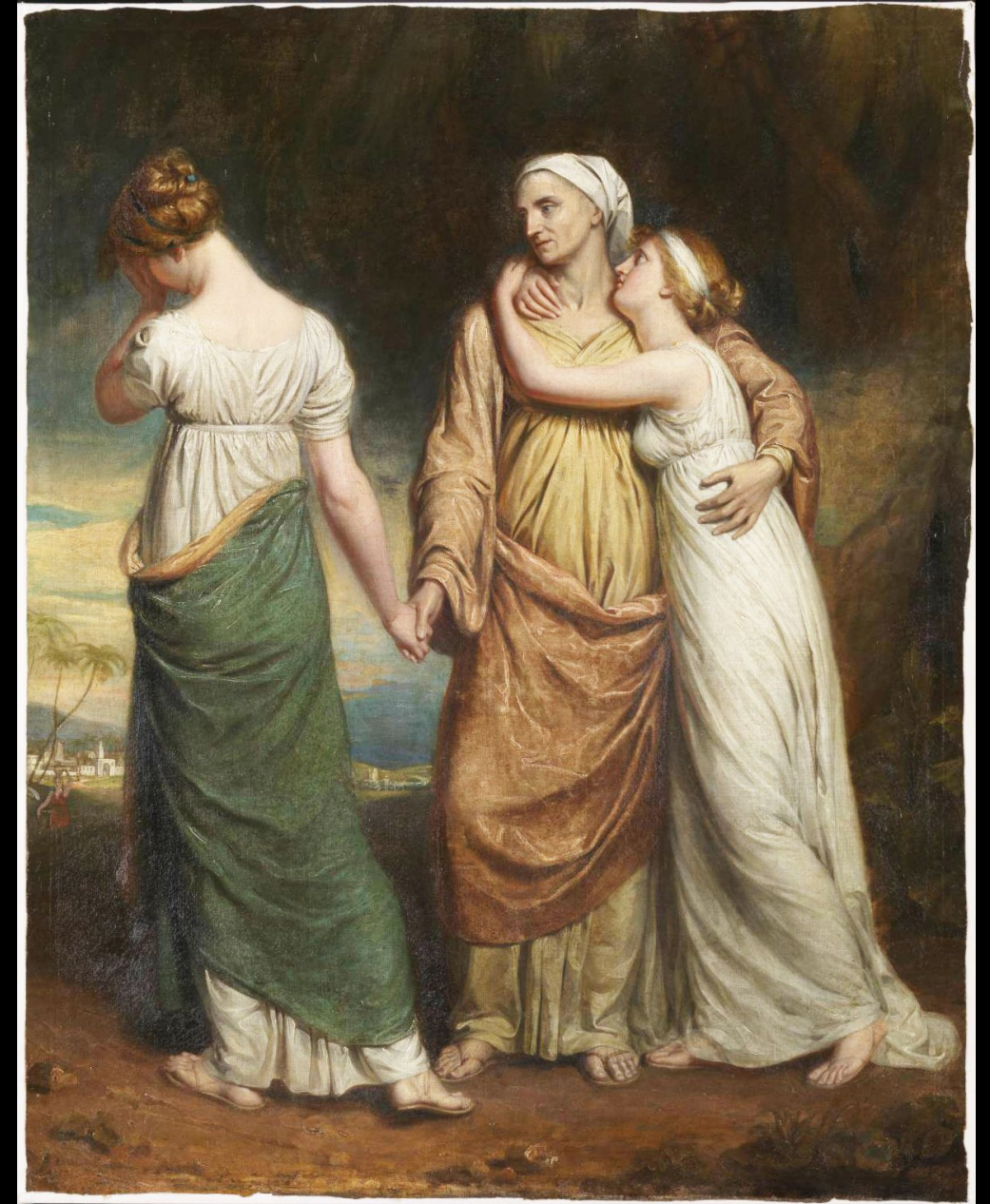
Naomi departs Moab for Bethlehem with Ruth and Orpah following.

Conversation on the road: Naomi urges them to return to their homes.

Naomi blesses Ruth and Orpah: “May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me.”

Orpah returns to Moab.

Ruth refuses to leave, pledges her loyalty to Naomi (including conversion to Yahweh), and “returns” with Naomi to Bethlehem.



Scene 3: Naomi and Ruth arrive in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

The town is stirred. "Is this Naomi?"
Naomi's lament.

Don't call me Naomi (**Pleasant**); call me Mara (**Bitter**), "for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me."

"I went away **full**, and the LORD has brought me back **empty**."

The Pivot point in the story:

Ruth 1:22 —

"So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem **at the beginning of barley harvest**."



Lessons from Ruth

How do we make sense out of our suffering and struggles—trials, tests, and temptations?

What do you do in the middle of pain and loss?

What do you do when you are running on empty?

1. See your suffering in the context of God's sovereignty.

Believers have the great advantage of seeing our suffering in the context of God's Sovereignty.

A **season of suffering** may not be the whole story of your life (e.g. Joseph in Egypt).

The events that turned Naomi's pleasant fullness into bitter emptiness were **not the end of the story**, but the **beginning** of events that turned into even greater pleasantness/fullness.

Naomi will hold her grandson **Obed**, whose grandson **David** will become Israel's greatest king.



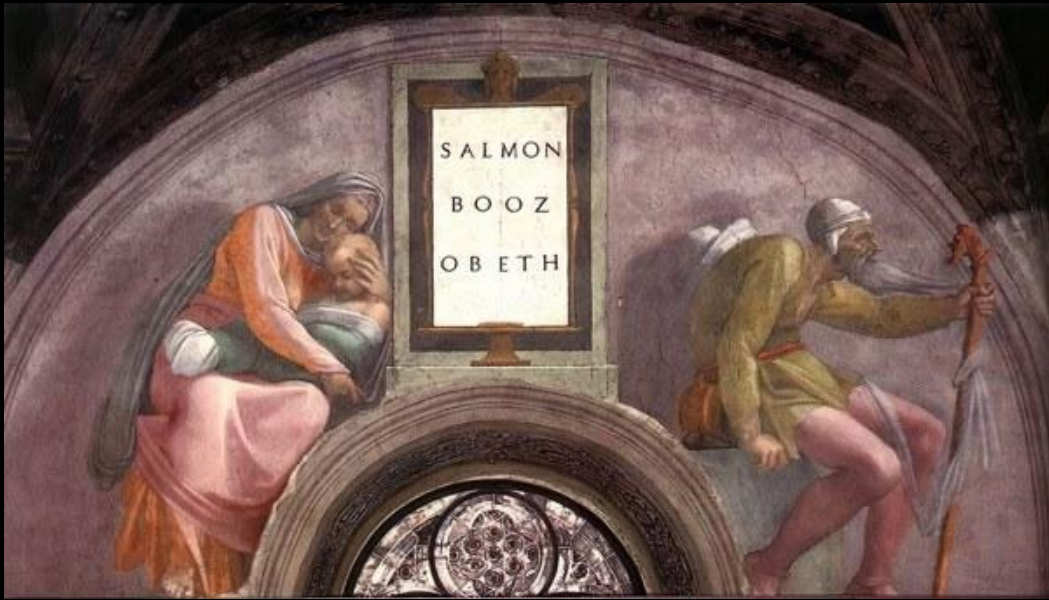
2. You may still bless other people while experiencing bitter suffering.

Naomi could still bless her daughters-in-law even in the midst of her bitter suffering.

"May the Lord deal kindly (Hebrew: *hesed*) with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me."



Somewhere in this story, **Ruth** was converted to the Lord and became a Jew who would be the great-grandmother of King David and an ancestor of Jesus the Messiah.



3. When life is empty and bitter, don't miss the "Ruths" God may have put in your life for just that moment.

Naomi's lament about her bitter emptiness was spoken just one scene after Ruth has pledged that she would never leave her.



4. Don't miss a barley harvest that may be on your horizon.



While Ruth 1 is the story of bitter loss and emptiness, that part of the story ends at the **beginning of a barley harvest** that will change Ruth and Naomi's lives for the better and will change the course of history forever.



5. If your relationship with God has grown cold, get out of Moab!

Naomi's turning point came when she made the decision to return home to the land of Israel where she belonged.

If your relationship with God has grown cold, get out of Moab!

Repent! Return to Bethlehem—return to those people and places that will help you re-connect with God.

