

## Who was Naomi in the Bible?

The story of Naomi appears in the Bible in the book of Ruth. Naomi lived during the time of the judges. She was the wife of a man named Elimelech, and they lived in Bethlehem with their two sons, Mahlon and Kilion. Naomi's life illustrates the power of God to bring something good out of bitter circumstances.

When a famine hits Judea, Elimelech and Naomi and their two boys relocate to Moab (Ruth 1:1). There, Mahlon and Kilion marry two Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. After about ten years, tragedy strikes. Elimelech dies, and both of Naomi's sons also die, leaving Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah widows (Ruth 1:3-5). Naomi, hearing that the famine in Judea was over, decides to return home (Ruth 1:6). Orpah stays in Moab, but Ruth chooses to move to the land of Israel with Naomi. The book of Ruth is the story of Naomi and Ruth returning to Bethlehem and how Ruth married a man named Boaz and bore a son, Obed, who became the grandfather of David and the ancestor of Jesus Christ.

The name Naomi means "sweet, pleasant," which gives us an idea of Naomi's basic character. We see her giving her blessing to Ruth and Orpah when she tells them to return to their mothers' homes so that they might find new husbands: she kisses them and asks that the Lord deal kindly with them (Ruth 1:8-14). But her heartache in Moab was more than Naomi could bear. When she and Ruth arrive in Bethlehem, the women of the town greet Naomi by name, but she cries, "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). The name Mara means "bitter." The cup of affliction is a bitter cup, but Naomi understood that the affliction came from the God who is sovereign in all things. Little did she know that from this bitter sorrow great

blessings would come to her, her descendants, and the world through Jesus Christ.

Ruth meets a local landowner, Boaz, who is very kind to her. Naomi again recognizes the providence of God in providing a kinsman-redeemer for Ruth. Naomi declares that the Lord "has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead" (Ruth 2:20) Seeing God's hand in these events, Naomi encourages Ruth to go to Boaz as he slept in the threshing floor in order to request that he redeem her and her property. Naomi's concern was for Ruth's future, that Ruth would gain a husband and provider (Ruth 3).

Naomi's bitterness is turned to joy. In the end, she gains a son-in-law who would provide for both her and Ruth. She also becomes a grandmother to Ruth's son, Obed. Then the women of Bethlehem say to Naomi, "Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a guardian-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" (Ruth 4:14-15). Naomi was no longer Mara. Her life again became sweet and pleasant, blessed by God.