

## Naomi – Mother in law of Ruth

### Readings Proverbs 31 the book of Ruth

In our series on OT women we meet Naomi another of Christ's ancestors.

Naomi is the mother-in-law of Ruth who the book is named for. Mothers-in-law often get a raw deal in humour, and even those who get on well with their mother-in-law would probably say its not the most straight forward of relationships to develop. Grandmothers on the other hand, have a much better press, while people look forward to becoming grandparents few of us who have adult children look forward with the same anticipation to becoming in-laws and developing a family relationship with another adult who will change our family dynamic.

The story of Ruth is probably a familiar one for many of us, its a very short book just 4 chapters and revolves around the relationship between Naomi and Ruth. The first of the chapters is a catalogue of disasters Naomi (meaning pleasant) is married to Elimelech and they live in Bethlehem where there is a famine, so with their two sons Mahlon and Chilion they decide to head to Moab, a journey of about 30 miles but where there is food.

The young family settle in to a new life in Moab but then Elimelech dies. The boys grow up and marry women from Moab, but 10 years later and with no grandchildren for Naomi both Mahlon and Chilion also die. Leaving Naomi and her daughters-in-law alone.

Naomi hears there is food again in Bethlehem and decides to head home, at first both her daughters-in-law Orpah and Ruth say they will go with her, custom at the time meant they should marry the nearest male relative of their dead husbands and continue the family line so they would be expected to travel with Naomi. Part way to Bethlehem and in an amazing show of consideration for her daughters in law, Naomi suggests the younger women head back to their homes, saying:

"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. May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband." (Ruth 1:8&9)

Orpah heads back. Ruth says very eloquently that she will go with Naomi, perhaps over the previous decade she has come to love and care for her mother -in-law or perhaps she just wants to see somewhere different and find out what Bethlehem is like. The two women head into Bethlehem, where Naomi announces she should be called Mara (meaning bitter) as she has returned empty to her home town.

But the story goes on to prove that Naomi is far from empty, she has a great knowledge of Jewish law and local tradition and of Elimelech's family, both of which she uses to provide for Ruth and herself.

Ruth gleans in the fields of Boaz and catches his eye, he offers her protection, gives her lunch and sends her home with plenty of grain for the two women to live on.

Naomi realises that he is one of Elimelech's family and encourages Ruth to continue to glean in his fields. Boaz is described as a man of 'noble character' - the same high praise given to the wife described in Proverbs 31. Following a plan of Naomi's Boaz takes the necessary steps to take over Elimelech's land and become Ruth's husband.

Naomi might have declared that she was 'bitter' and empty when her husband and sons had died, but she didn't let that stop her, she travelled back to her home town with Ruth who was loyal to her even when things were rough. Naomi then showed her care for Ruth by directing her to follow a route that leads her to finding a husband who is respected and is also keen to do things the right way. The end of the book sees Naomi with her newborn grandson on her lap and the neighbours saying 'Naomi has a son'. The bible goes on to tell us that that baby becomes the grandfather of King David.

However, people come into our lives whether through marriage as with Naomi and Ruth or through friendship or any other route, wouldn't it be great if we could be as caring and thoughtful as Naomi, acting in the best of interests of others - maybe then we would find peace, happiness and fulfilment just as Naomi did.