



# Ruth

Woman of Loyalty, Humility, Love, Strength, and Faith

# *The Story of Ruth*

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

In the days when the judges ruled Israel, a man from Bethlehem in Judah left the country because of a severe famine. He took his wife and two sons and went to live in the country of Moab. The man's name was Elimelech, and his wife was Naomi. Their two sons were Mahlan and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in the land of Judah.

During their stay in Moab, Elimelech died and Naomi was left with her two sons. The two sons married Moabite women. One married a woman named Orpah, and the other a woman named Ruth.

But about ten years later, both Mahlon and Kilion died. This left Naomi alone, without her husband or sons. Then Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had blessed his people in Judah by giving them good crops again. So Naomi and her daughters-in-law got ready to leave Moab to return to her homeland.

With her two daughters-in-law she set out from the place where she had been living. They took the road that would lead them back to Judah. But on the way, Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back to your mothers' homes instead of coming with me. And may the Lord reward you for your kindness to your husbands and to me. May the Lord bless you with the security of another marriage." Then she kissed them good-bye, and they all broke down and wept. "No," they said. "We want to go with you to your people."

But Naomi replied, "Why should you go on with me? Can I still give birth to other sons who could grow up to be your husbands? No, my daughters, return to your parents' homes, for I am too old to marry again. And even if it were possible and I were to get married tonight and bear sons, then what? Would you wait for them to grow up and refuse to marry someone else? No, of course not, my daughters! Things are far more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord himself has caused me to suffer."

And again they wept together, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye. But Ruth insisted on staying with Naomi. "See," Naomi said to her, "your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods. You should do the same." But Ruth replied, "Don't ask me to leave you and turn back. I will go where you go and live where you live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. I will die where you die and will be buried there. May the Lord punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!" So when Naomi saw that Ruth had made up her mind to go with her, she stopped urging her.

## **Ruth 1:19-22**

So the two of them continued on their journey. When they came to Bethlehem, the entire town was stirred by their arrival. "Is it really Naomi?" the women asked. "Don't call me Naomi," she told them. "Instead, call me Mara, for the Almighty has made life very bitter for me. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me home empty. Why should you call me Naomi when the Lord has caused me to suffer and the Almighty has sent such tragedy?"

So Naomi returned from Moab, accompanied by her daughter-in-law Ruth, the young Moabite woman. They arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

## **Ruth 2:1-7**

Now there was a wealthy and influential man in Bethlehem named Boaz, who was a relative of Naomi's husband, Elimelek. And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi. "Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor." Naomi said to her, "Go ahead, my daughter." So she went out, entered a field and began to glean from the clan of Elimelek.

Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters. "The Lord be with you!" "The Lord bless you!" they answered. Boaz asked the overseer of his harvesters, "Who does that young woman belong to?" The overseer replied, "She is the Moabite who came back from Moab with Naomi." "She said, 'Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters.' She came into the field and has remained here from morning until now, except for a short rest in the shelter."

## **Ruth 2:8-13**

Boaz went over and said to Ruth, "Listen, my daughter. Stay right here with us when you gather grain; don't go to any other fields. See which part of the field they are harvesting, and then follow them. I have warned the young men not to bother you. And when you are thirsty, help yourself to the water they have drawn from the well."

Ruth fell at his feet and thanked him warmly. "Why are you so kind to me?" she asked. "I am only a foreigner." "Yes, I know," Boaz replied. "But I also know about the love and kindness you have shown your mother-in-law since the death of your husband. I have heard how you left your father and mother and your own land to live here among complete strangers. May the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge, reward you fully."

"I hope I continue to please you, sir," she replied. "You have comforted me by speaking so kindly to me, even though I am not as worthy as your workers."

## **Ruth 2:14-21**

At lunchtime Boaz called to her, "Come over here and help yourself to some of our food. You can dip your bread in the wine if you like." So she sat with his harvesters, and Boaz gave her food; more than she could eat. When Ruth went back to work again, Boaz ordered his young men, "Let her gather grain right among the sheaves without stopping her. And pull out some heads of barley from the bundles and drop them on purpose for her. Let her pick them up, and don't give her a hard time!"

So Ruth gathered barley there all day, and when she beat out the grain that evening, it came to about half a bushel. She carried it back into town and showed it to her mother-in-law. Ruth also gave her the food that was left over from her lunch. "So much!" Naomi exclaimed. "Where did you gather all this grain today? Where did you work? May the Lord bless the one who helped you!"

So Ruth told her mother-in-law about the man in whose field she had worked, and she said, "The man I worked with today is named Boaz." "May the Lord bless him!" Naomi told her daughter-in-law. "He is showing his kindness to us as well as to your dead husband. That man is one of our closest relatives, one of our family redeemers." Then Ruth said, "What's more, Boaz even told me to come back and stay with his harvesters until the entire harvest is completed."

### **Ruth 3:1-18**

One day Naomi said to Ruth, "My daughter, it's time that I found a permanent home for you, so that you will be provided for. Boaz is a close relative of ours, and he's been very kind by letting you gather grain with his workers. Tonight he will be winnowing barley at the threshing floor. Now do as I tell you – take a bath and put on perfume and dress in your nicest clothes. Then go to the threshing floor, but don't let Boaz see you until he has finished his meal. Be sure to notice where he lies down; then go and uncover his feet and lie down there. He will tell you what to do."

"I will do everything you say," Ruth replied. So she went down to the threshing floor that night and followed the instructions of her mother-in-law. After Boaz had finished his meal and was in good spirits, he lay down beside the heap of grain and went to sleep. Then Ruth came quietly, uncovered his feet, and lay down.

Around midnight, Boaz suddenly woke up and turned over. He was surprised to find a woman lying at his feet! "Who are you?" he demanded. "I am your servant Ruth," she replied. "Spread the corner of your covering over me, for you are my family redeemer."

"The Lord bless you, my daughter!" Boaz exclaimed. "You are showing more family loyalty now than ever by not running after a younger man, whether rich or poor. Now don't worry about a thing, my daughter. I will do what is necessary, for everyone in town knows you are an honorable woman. But there is one problem. While it is true that I am one of your family redeemers, there is another man who is more closely related to you than I am. Stay here tonight, and in the morning I will talk to him. If he is willing to redeem you, then let him marry you. But if he is not willing, then as surely as the Lord lives, I will marry you! Now lie down here until morning."

So Ruth lay at Boaz's feet until morning, but she got up before it was light enough for people to recognize each other. For Boaz said, "No one must know that a woman was here at the threshing floor." Boaz also said to her, "Bring your cloak and spread it out." He measured six scoops of barley into the cloak and helped her put it on her back. Then Boaz returned to town.

When Ruth went back to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked, "What happened, my daughter?" Ruth told Naomi everything Boaz had done for her, and she added, "He gave me these six scoops of barley and said, 'Don't go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.'" Then Naomi said to her, "Just be patient, my daughter, until we hear what happens. The man won't rest until he has followed through on this. He will settle it today."

### **Ruth 4:1-15, 17**

So Boaz went to the town gate and took a seat there. When the family redeemer he had mentioned came by, Boaz called out to him, "Come over here friend. I want to talk to you." So they sat down together. Then Boaz called ten leaders from the town and asked them to sit as witnesses. And Boaz said to the family redeemer, "You know Naomi, who came back from Moab. She is selling the land that belonged to our relative Elimilech. I felt that I should speak to you about it so that you can redeem it if you wish. If you want the land, then buy it here in the presence of these witnesses. But if you don't want it, let me know right away, because I am next in line to redeem it after you." The man replied, "All right, I'll redeem it."

Then Boaz told him, "Of course, your purchase of the land from Naomi also requires that you marry Ruth, the Moabite widow. That way, she can have children who will carry on her husband's name and keep the land in the family."

"Then I can't redeem it," the family redeemer replied, "because this might endanger my own estate. You redeem the land; I cannot do it."

Now In those days it was the custom in Israel for anyone transferring a right of purchase to remove his sandal and hand it to the other party. This publicly validated the transaction. So the other family redeemer drew off his sandal as he said to Boaz, "You buy the land." Then Boaz said to the leaders and to the crowd standing around, "You are witnesses that today I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Kilion, and Mahlon. And with the land I have acquired Ruth, the Moabite widow of Mahlon, to be my wife. This way she can have a son to carry on the family name of her dead husband and to inherit the family property here in his hometown. You are all witnesses today."

Then the leaders and all the people standing there replied, "We are witnesses! May the Lord make the woman who is now coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, from whom all the nation of Israel descend! May you be great in Ephrathah and famous in Bethlehem. And may the Lord give you descendants by this young woman who will be like those of our ancestor Perez, the son of Tamar and Judah."

So Boaz married Ruth and took her home to live with him. When he slept with her, the Lord enabled her to become pregnant, and she gave birth to a son. And the women of the town said to Naomi, "Praise the Lord who has given you a family redeemer today! May he be famous in Israel. May this child restore your youth and care for you in your old age. For he is the son of your daughter-in-law who loves you so much and who has been better to you than seven sons!"

The neighbor woman said, "Now at last Naomi has a son again!" And they call him Obed. He became the father of Jesse and the grandfather of King David.

## *Study Guide*

Read the story of Ruth, and discuss the following questions. Keep in mind there is more to the story of this woman than what is presented in the few short verses.

During the time of the judges, the people of Israel were in a dark place where they suffered greatly. This was because they had chosen to become their own authority and determine for themselves what was right or wrong and to disregard God's law if it meant satisfying their own selfish desires. However, there were still a few who trusted God and followed him. The book of Ruth gives us a glimpse into the lives of two such women who became a shining light in the midst of the darkness.

**1. The story of Ruth is above all a story of commitment and love. When Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem after her husband and her two sons died, she told both her daughters-in-law to return to their families and to remarry. As an older woman traveling alone, what do you think she was sacrificing to let them go?**

- Very possibly her life, as it was a hard road back to Bethlehem. Having loved her daughters-in-law like her own daughters, she would be losing the only family she had left.

**2. What was Ruth sacrificing when she refused to leave Naomi and said she would go to Bethlehem and stay with her there until parted by death?**

- As a Moabite woman, she would not be readily accepted in Bethlehem.
- She would never see her mother, father, or other family again.
- Although Naomi had made the trip once when she was younger, Ruth had no idea what they would have to face, two women traveling alone.

3. ***Since the trip to Bethlehem required walking through the mountains and around the north end of the Dead Sea, a distance that appears to be about 40-50 miles, do you think Naomi would have been able to make the trip with only what she could carry with her and arrive safely?***
- Being an older woman alone, she would be a target for robbers.
  - Naomi alone would not have been able to carry enough water and food for the entire trip without some help.
  - As an older woman, she would need to go slower and stop more often and this would have prevented her from traveling with a caravan or other travelers she may have met on the road.
4. ***Although Ruth and Naomi were from different cultures, with different family backgrounds, and their ages were very different, they were bound to each other. They shared great sorrow, great affection for each other, and shared a commitment to the God of Israel. In their relationship they each tried to do what was best for the other person. When you are asked for help by those you hold dear, do you only help them if it is not going to inconvenience you financially or time-wise?***
- Do you help your children or grandchildren if you see them struggling financially?
  - If you have elderly family members who need help doing things, do you help or do you put them somewhere where someone else can help them?
  - If you have no children, do you help others you have relationships with?
  - When you see people collecting for charity at the entrance to a store, do you take another exit so you won't have to give because you only have 5 dollars on you and you want to get a coffee on your way home?
5. ***Ruth told Naomi, "Let me go out into the harvest fields to pick up the stalks of grain left behind by anyone who is kind enough to let me do it." The grain could be collected by the poor and made into food. Ruth knew that she would most likely be turned away for being a Moabite, but she also knew this is what she would have to do if they were going to survive. Because she was willing to labor to take care of Naomi, how was she blessed for her loyalty and her labor?***
- She ended up in the field of Boaz, who was a relative of her dead husband.
  - She was shown kindness and compassion and given safe working conditions.
  - She was given enough food to share with Naomi when they had their lunch breaks.
  - Boaz made sure that there was extra grain left behind, enough to get them through comfortably until the next harvest.
  - Boaz had an opportunity to see for himself what kind of a person Ruth was.
6. ***Divine intervention took place throughout Ruth's life. Ruth and Naomi's return to Bethlehem was certainly not a coincidence, as it led to the fulfillment of God's plan; that King David would be born there as predicted by the prophet Micah (Micah 5: 2), and that Jesus Christ the Messiah would also be born there. This move was so much more than a move of convenience for Naomi. What destiny did Ruth have that brought her to Bethlehem?***
- To meet Boaz, have her son, Obed, and be the great-grandmother of King David.

- 7. Boaz appears to us as a heroic person. He shows great compassion and concern for his workers and relatives, and is dedicated to his community. As we praise him for his kindness, generosity, and willingness to do the right thing, keep in mind his mother is Rahab, the prostitute from Jericho who allowed God to change her life and to raise a son with such a kind heart. Do you judge yourself or others because of who their parents are, where they live, or what they do for work? Who alone has the right to know and judge another's worth?**
- God alone has the right to judge the worth of another being. We cannot know what is in another's heart if we have already judged them by how they look, where they came from, what they do for a living, or what their religious faith is.
- 8. When Naomi sent Ruth to the threshing shed, Ruth did as she was instructed. What did going to the threshing shed and lying at the feet of Boaz mean to him?**
- She was asking him to be her family redeemer, to take her under his protection by extending his cloak to cover her, and that she would be willing to marry him and to have his child.
- 9. What did going to the threshing shed mean for Ruth?**
- It meant that she would accept him as her family redeemer and that she would be willing to marry him.
- 10. When Boaz said he would talk to the closer relative right away, Naomi told Ruth to have faith that Boaz would take care of it right away. What does this say about Boaz?**
- Boaz had a reputation as a generous and honorable man who helped other people in his town. He was a man who would keep his word.
- 11. Boaz cleverly presented the offer to buy Naomi's land and marry Ruth to provide an heir for her dead husband to the closer relative in a manner that would cause him to decline. What does this tell us about how Boaz must have felt about Ruth?**
- Along with the whole town, he had seen Ruth's love and commitment to Naomi, and that she was a very honorable woman. Observing her in his field, he was aware of her humility and moral character; that she was beautiful inside and out. He was surprised she would choose him over the younger workers. His admiration and love for her, and hers for him, allowed them to raise a worthy son who became the grandfather of King David.
- 12. Out of the great tragedy suffered by Naomi, God brought great blessings upon her. During the hard times in your life, do you trust God to be with you, or do you blame God when something bad happens?**
- Do you find yourself saying, "How can God allow this to happen to me?" Remember, Naomi, through her daughter-in-law Ruth, was only three generations away from King David.
- 13. The story of Ruth may seem like a nice story of a girl who was very fortunate. But we must remember that the story of Ruth is about the preparations for the birth of King David and of Jesus. Ruth may not have been aware of the great purpose of her life. You may not be aware of the larger purpose in your life, but you can be assured that you are important to God's plan. How can you live Ruth's example in your life today?**
- Substitute your family, your spouse, or your faith for Naomi, and show the same commitment, love, and trust for them Ruth demonstrated. By not getting sidetracked with pleasures of the moment, you can know that the reward for your sacrifices is far greater than any passing pleasure.

# What If...

Although not as notorious as some of our honored women, Ruth was just as courageous, strong, and committed to God as they. Even though she was not an Israelite but a Moabite, God chose her to demonstrate what it meant to be one of his people.

The story of Ruth takes place at the time of the judges. These were dark times when people became their own authority and acted on their own opinions of right and wrong, which brought terrible trouble to the Israelite people. Ruth stands out as a light in the darkness of the times.

Her story is a story of love and loyalty, commitment and faith, and above all, it's a story about relationships; her relationship to Naomi as her daughter-in-law, her relationship to the God of Israel, and her relationship to Boaz, her second husband. Ruth could have returned home to her parents, which would have been the easy thing to do, but she chose to stay with Naomi and spoke one of the most quoted verses of the Bible:

***"I will go where you go and live where you live. Your people will be my people and your God will be my God. I will die where you die and will be buried there. May the Lord punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!" (Ruth 1:16-17)***

Naomi and Ruth returned to Bethlehem as poor widows with no resources and only each other to count on. Ruth humbled herself and asked for work gleaning in the fields for food so that she and Naomi would be able to eat. Gleaning was hard, hot, back-breaking work, yet Ruth's attitude was one of extreme gratitude for such an opportunity to be given to a foreigner and a Moabite. Ruth showed a high work ethic in that she was grateful for the work. How many people today are complaining about their work, their pay, their bosses, and have little gratitude for the wealth and opportunity that surrounds them?

We need to remember Ruth and her faith in God which brought her to the field of Boaz who changed her life. Everyone who knew Naomi or who had the opportunity to meet Ruth knew of her dedication and love for Naomi and all the sacrifices she had made to come with her to a foreign land, and they came to love and admire her for it.

Boaz came to first admire Ruth for the humble and selfless woman she was and then came to love and care for her as his wife. Because she followed her heart and stayed with Naomi, she was blessed by God with a husband and a son, and a second chance at a happy life.

When Ruth became wife to Naomi's son Mahlon, she left her old life behind and came to know the one true God. When Naomi suggested she should go home to her parents, not only could she not leave Naomi whom she loved, but she could no longer worship the idols of her family after coming to know God. Once she chose to be one of his people, she could worship no other. Because her heart was more open to him than many of the Israelites of the time, she was blessed with a son and to be the great-grandmother of one of the greatest kings of Israel, King David.

***Ruth was a part of God's plan as in this town David would be born (1 Samuel 16:1) as predicted by the prophet Micah. (Micah 5:2)***