

The Book of Ruth

Grace Found In the
Midst Of Difficulties

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Ruth

OVERVIEW: WHEN someone says, “Let me tell you about my mother-in-law,” we expect some kind of negative statement or humorous anecdote because the mother-in-law caricature has been a standard centerpiece of ridicule or comedy. The book of Ruth, however, tells a different story. Ruth loved her mother-in-law, Naomi.

Recently widowed, Ruth begged to stay with Naomi wherever she went, even though it would mean leaving her homeland. In heartfelt words Ruth said, “Your people will be my people and your God my God” (Ruth 1:16). Naomi agreed, and Ruth traveled with her to Bethlehem.

Not much is said about Naomi except that she loved and cared for Ruth. Obviously, Naomi’s life was a powerful witness to the reality of God. Ruth was drawn to her—and to the God she worshiped. In the succeeding months and years, God led this young Moabite widow to a man named Boaz, whom she eventually married. As a result, she became the great-grandmother of David and an ancestor in the line of the Messiah. What a profound impact Naomi’s life made!

The book of Ruth is also the story of God’s grace in the midst of difficult circumstances. Ruth’s story occurred during the time of the judges—a period of disobedience, idolatry, and violence. Even in times of crisis and deepest despair, there are those who follow God and through whom God works. No matter how discouraging or antagonistic the world may seem, there are always people who follow God. He will use anyone who is open to him to achieve his purposes. Ruth was a Moabite and Boaz was a descendant of Rahab, a former prostitute from Jericho. Nevertheless, their offspring continued the family line through which the Messiah came into our world.

Read this book and be encouraged. God is at work in the world, and he wants to use you. God could use you, as he used Naomi, to bring family and friends to him.

THE BLUEPRINT

When we first meet Ruth, she is a destitute widow. We follow her as she joins God's people, gleanes in the grain-fields, and risks her honor at the threshing floor of Boaz. In the end, we see Ruth becoming the wife of Boaz. What a picture of how we come to faith in Christ. We begin with no hope and are rebellious aliens with no part in the kingdom of God. Then as we risk everything by putting our faith in Christ, God saves us, forgives us, rebuilds our lives, and gives us blessings that will last through eternity. Boaz's redeeming of Ruth is a picture of Christ redeeming us.

1. Ruth remains loyal to Naomi (Ruth 1:1-22)

In the days when the judges ruled in 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. [2] The man's name was Elimelech, and his wife was Naomi. Their two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in the land of Judah. During their stay in Moab,

[3] Elimelech died and Naomi was left with her two sons. [4] The two sons married Moabite women. One married a woman named Orpah, and the other a woman named Ruth. But about ten years later, [5] both Mahlon and Kilion died. This left Naomi alone, without her husband or sons.

[6] 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. [7] With her two daughters-in-law she set out from the place where she had been living, and they took the road that would lead them back to Judah.

[8] 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. [9] May the Lord bless you with the security of another marriage." Then she kissed them good-bye, and they all broke down and wept.

[10] "No," they said. "We want to go with you to your people."

[11] 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? [12] 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?

[13] 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."

[14] And again they wept together, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye. But Ruth insisted on staying with Naomi. [15] "See," Naomi said to her, "your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. You should do the same."

[16] But Ruth replied, "Don't ask me to leave you and turn back. I will go wherever you go and live wherever you live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. [17] 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!" [18] So when Naomi saw that Ruth had made up her mind to go with her, she stopped urging her.

[19] 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.

[20] "Don't call me Naomi," she told them. "Instead, call me Mara, for the Almighty has made life very bitter for me. [21] 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?"

[22] 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.

2. Ruth gleanes in Boaz's field (Ruth 2:1-23)

Ruth 2:1-23

Now there was a wealthy and influential man in Bethlehem named Boaz, who was a relative of Naomi's husband, Elimelech.

[2] One day Ruth said to Naomi, "Let me go out into the fields to gather leftover grain behind anyone who will let me do it."

And Naomi said, "All right, my daughter, go ahead." [3] So Ruth went out to gather grain behind the harvesters. And as it happened, she found herself working in a field that belonged to Boaz, the relative of her father-in-law, Elimelech.

[4] While she was there, Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters. "The Lord be with you!" he said.

"The Lord bless you!" the harvesters replied.

[5] Then Boaz asked his foreman, "Who is that girl over there?"

[6] And the foreman replied, "She is the young woman from Moab who came back with Naomi. [7] She asked me this morning if she could gather grain behind the harvesters. She has been hard at work ever since, except for a few minutes' rest over there in the shelter."

[8] 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. Stay right behind the women working in my field. [9] 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."

[10] Ruth fell at his feet and thanked him warmly. "Why are you being so kind to me?" she asked. "I am only a foreigner."

[11] "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. [12] May the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge, reward you fully."

[13] "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."

[14] 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.

[15] When Ruth went back to work again, Boaz ordered his young men, "Let her gather grain right among the sheaves without stopping her. [16] 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!"

[17] So Ruth gathered barley there all day, and when she beat out the grain that evening, it came to about half a bushel. [18] 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.

[19] "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."

[20] "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."

[21] Then Ruth said, "What's more, Boaz even told me to come back and stay with his harvesters until the entire harvest is completed."

[22] "This is wonderful!" Naomi exclaimed. "Do as he said. Stay with his workers right through the whole harvest. You will be safe there, unlike in other fields."

[23] So Ruth worked alongside the women in Boaz's fields and gathered grain with them until the end of the barley harvest. Then she worked with them through the wheat harvest, too. But all the while she lived with her mother-in-law.

3. Ruth follows Naomi's plan (Ruth 3:1-18)

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. [2] 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. [3] 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.

[4] 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."

[5] "I will do everything you say," Ruth replied. [6] So she went down to the threshing floor that night and followed the instructions of her mother-in-law.

[7] 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. [8] Around midnight, Boaz suddenly woke up and turned over. He was surprised to find a woman lying at his feet! [9] "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."

[10] "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. [11] 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. [12] 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.

[13] 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."

[14] So Ruth lay at Boaz's feet until the 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." [15] Boaz also said to her, "Bring your cloak and spread it out." He measured out six scoops of barley into the cloak and helped her put it on her back. Then Boaz returned to the town.

[16] When Ruth went back to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked, "What happened, my daughter?"

Ruth told Naomi everything Boaz had done for her, [17] and she added, "He gave me these six scoops of barley and said, 'Don't go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.' "

[18] 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."

4. Ruth and Boaz are married (Ruth 4:1-22)

Ruth 4:1-22

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.

[2] Then Boaz called ten leaders from the town and asked them to sit as witnesses. [3] 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 Elimelech.

[4] 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."

[5] 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."

[6] "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."

[7] 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. [8] So the other family redeemer drew off his sandal as he said to Boaz, "You buy the land."

[9] 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. [10] 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."

[11] 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 descended! May you be great in Ephrathah and famous in Bethlehem. [12] 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."

[13] 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. [14] 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. [15] 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!"

[16] Naomi took care of the baby and cared for him as if he were her own. [17] The neighbor women said, "Now at last Naomi has a son again!" And they named him Obed. He became the father of Jesse and the grandfather of David.

[18] This is their family line beginning with their ancestor Perez:

Perez was the father of Hezron.

[19] Hezron was the father of Ram.
Ram was the father of Amminadab.

[20] Amminadab was the father of Nahshon.
Nahshon was the father of Salmon.

[21] Salmon was the father of Boaz.
Boaz was the father of Obed.

[22] Obed was the father of Jesse.
Jesse was the father of David.

MEGATHEMES

THEME: Faithfulness

EXPLANATION: Ruth's faithfulness to Naomi as a daughter-in-law and friend is a great example of love and loyalty. Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz are also faithful to God and his laws. Throughout the story we see God's faithfulness to his people.

IMPORTANCE: Ruth's life was guided by faithfulness toward God and showed itself in loyalty toward the people she knew. To be loyal and loving in relationships, we must imitate God's faithfulness in our relationships with others.

THEME: Kindness

EXPLANATION:

Ruth showed great kindness to Naomi. In turn, Boaz showed kindness to Ruth—a despised Moabite woman with no money. God showed his kindness to Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz by bringing them together for his purposes.

IMPORTANCE:

Just as Boaz showed his kindness by buying back land to guarantee Ruth and Naomi's inheritance, so Christ showed his kindness by dying for us to guarantee our eternal life. God's kindness should motivate us to love and honor him.

THEME: Integrity

EXPLANATION:

Ruth showed high moral character by being loyal to Naomi, by her clean break from her former land and customs, and by her hard work in the fields. Boaz showed integrity in his moral standards, his honesty, and by following through on his commitments.

IMPORTANCE:

When we have experienced God's faithfulness and kindness, we should respond by showing integrity. Just as the values by which Ruth and Boaz lived were in sharp contrast to those of the culture portrayed in Judges, so our lives should stand out from the world around us.

THEME: Protection

EXPLANATION:

We see God's care and protection over the lives of Naomi and Ruth. His supreme control over circumstances brings them safety and security. He guides the minds and activities of people to fulfill his purpose.

IMPORTANCE:

No matter how devastating our present situation may be, our hope is in God. His resources are infinite. We must believe that he can work in the life of any person—whether that person is a king or a stranger in a foreign land. Trust his protection.

THEME: Prosperity/Blessing

EXPLANATION:

Ruth and Naomi came to Bethlehem as poor widows, but they soon became prosperous through Ruth's marriage to Boaz. Ruth became the great-grandmother of King David. Yet the greatest blessing was not the money, the marriage, or the child; it was the quality of love and respect between Ruth, Boaz, and Naomi.

IMPORTANCE:

We tend to think of blessings in terms of prosperity rather than the high-quality relationships God makes possible for us. No matter what our economic situation, we can love and respect the people God has brought into our lives. In so doing, we give and receive blessings. Love is the greatest blessing.

An invitation to open the door of your heart.

Revelation 3:20

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

To ask Jesus to come into your heart please pray this Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and coming into my heart. I accept you as savior and will follow you as Lord. Amen.

References:

Holy Bible: King James Translation

Holy Bible: Living Bible Translation

Additional comments and charts are taken from: *Life Application Study Bible*. Illinois: Tyndale House 2007. Print