

# RUTH

Ruth 1 - 4

## STRUCTURE

**Key-persons:** Naomi, Ruth, Boaz

**Key-locations:** Moab, Bethlehem

**Key-repetitions:**

- Problems: hunger (Ru 1:1); death (Ru 1:3; 5); Naomi telling her daughters-in-laws Orpha and Ruth to return to their mother's home (Ru 1:11-18); embittered Naomi (Ru 1:13; 20); need of food (Ru 2:2); the danger of Ruth being abused (Ru 2:9; 22); Naomi needed to find a husband for Ruth (Ru 3:1).
- Boaz helped Ruth: he made it easy for her to gather grain (Ru 2:8-9, 15-16); he offered water and food (Ru 2:9, 14); he encouraged her (Ru 2:11-12); he offered her protection (Ru 2:9, 16, 22); he valued her as a person (Ru 2:11, 3:11).

**Key-attitudes:**

- Ruth's persistence in facing obstacles.
- Naomi's bitterness.
- Ruth's virtue.
- Boaz's kindness.
- Naomi's happiness after facing many problems.

**Initial-situation:**

Ruth's story happened during the time when judges ruled in Israel. In those days, Israel had no king. Everyone did what he thought was right and each generation became worse than their parents' generation.

**Initial-problem:**

During the time when judges ruled in Israel, there was a famine in Judah. Elimelech, his wife Naomi and their two sons left Judah to go to the country of Moab.

**Final-situation:**

Ruth, the daughter-in-law of Elimelech and Naomi, had a son named Obed. He became the grandfather of David.

## BIBLE STORY

**Naomi and Ruth Return to Bethlehem**

In the days when judges ruled, Israel had no king. Everyone did as he saw fit (Jdg 21:25).

During the time when the judges led Israel, there was a famine. Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their two sons left their home in Bethlehem of Judah, to live in the country of Moab. Elimelech died. Naomi's two sons married Moabite women. After they lived in Moab for ten years, Naomi's two sons died (Ru 1:1-5).

Naomi heard that there was going to be a harvest in Judah. Naomi and her two daughters-in-law left Moab and set out on the road that would take them to Judah. After a short time on the road, Naomi told Orpha and Ruth, her two daughters-in-law, "Go back to your mother's home. May the Lord show kindness to you, as you have shown to your deceased husbands and to me. May the Lord give each of you a new home and a new husband."

She kissed them. They cried out loud, "No, we will go with you to your people" (Ru 1:6-10).

But Naomi said, "Return home, my dear daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you. The Lord is against me!"

Orpah kissed her mother-in-law Naomi good-bye, but Ruth clung to Naomi.

Naomi said, "Look, your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go with her."

Ruth replied, "Don't force me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go, I'll go, and where you stay, I'll stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die, I'll die, and that is where I'll be buried. I ask the Lord to punish me if I don't keep this promise: Nothing but death will separate you from me." Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, so she stopped arguing with her (Ru 1:11-18).

Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem. The town women buzzed, "Can this really be Naomi?"

Naomi told them, "Don't call me Naomi, which means happy. Call me Mara, which means bitter. The Almighty has made my life bitter. I left here full of life, but the Lord brought me back empty. The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has ruined me!" (Ru 1:19-21).

## **Ruth and Boaz**

Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest (Ru 1:22).

Boaz lived in Bethlehem and he was a prominent rich man. He was a relative of Naomi's deceased husband Elimelech.

One day Ruth said to Naomi, "Let me go to the fields. Maybe someone will be kind and let me gather the grain left in the field."

Naomi replied, "Go ahead, dear daughter."

Ruth went out and started gleaning in the fields behind the harvesters. It just so happened that the field belonged to Boaz, who was a close relative of Elimelech, her father-in-law (Ru 2:1-3).

Boaz arrived and asked the foreman of his harvesters, "Whose young woman is that?"

The foreman replied, "She's the Moabite woman who came back from the country of Moab with Naomi. She went into the field early this morning and has worked steadily."

Boaz spoke to Ruth, "My daughter, listen to me. Don't go to any other field to glean. Stay here in my field to gather grain with my servant girls. Watch where the men are harvesting, and follow along after my servant girls. I warned the men not to harass you. When you're thirsty, go and drink from the water jars the servants have filled."

Ruth dropped to her knees and bowed her face to the ground. Ruth exclaimed, "Why have you treated me so kindly, and I'm a foreigner?"

Boaz replied, "I've heard how you helped your mother-in-law after the death of your husband. You left your father, mother, and homeland, and came to live with a people where you didn't know anyone. The Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek protection, will pay you in full."

Ruth answered, "Oh, sir, you're kind to me. You've given me comfort. You've given me hope, even though I don't belong here. I'm not even one of your servant girls" (Ru 2:5-13).

At the lunch break, Boaz invited Ruth, "Come and eat some bread. Dip it in the wine vinegar."

Boaz gave Ruth some roasted grain. Ruth ate until she was full, got up, and went back to glean. Boaz ordered his men, "Don't embarrass her. Make it easy for her by pulling out some stalks for her from the bundles and leaving them for her to pick up. Don't rebuke her" (Ru 2:14-16).

So Ruth gathered grain. Then Ruth separated the grain from the chaff. Ruth took almost a full sack of barley back to her mother-in-law. Naomi saw how much she had gathered and asked her, "Where did you gather all that grain today? God bless the man who took such good care of you!"

Ruth said, "The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz."

Naomi said, "The Lord bless him! The Lord hasn't stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead. Boaz is our close relative. Boaz is one of our kinsmen-redeemers."

Ruth said, "Boaz told me to stay with his workers until they finish harvesting all his grain."

Naomi replied, "That will be good for you; in someone else's field you might be raped."

Ruth continued working in Boaz's fields until both the barley and wheat harvests were finished (Ru 2:17-23).

One day Naomi told Ruth, "My dear daughter, it's time for me to find you a husband who will give you a home and provide for you. Boaz is a close relative of ours. Tonight he'll be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. Wash and perfume yourself. Put on your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don't let Boaz see you. When he slips off to sleep, watch where he lies down. Go uncover his feet and lie down at his feet. He'll tell you what to do."

Ruth went to the threshing floor and put her mother-in-law's plan into action.

Boaz had a good time, eating and drinking. Then he lay down to sleep beside the pile of grain. Ruth approached, lifted the cover from his feet, and lay down. About midnight, something startled Boaz and he rolled over. Boaz was startled! There was a woman lying at his feet.

Boaz asked, "Who are you?"

She answered, "I'm your servant Ruth. Spread the corner of your cover over me. You're my close relative; you're a kinsman-redeemer."

Boaz replied, "The Lord bless you, my daughter. What a splendid expression of love. You've not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of amazing character. I myself will marry you. Then I'll buy Elimelech's land for you. Go back to sleep until morning."

Ruth slept near his feet until dawn, but rose while it was too dark to be recognized. Boaz told his servants, "Don't let it be known that a woman came to the threshing floor" (Ru 3:1-14).

Boaz married Ruth. The Lord enabled Ruth to conceive and give birth to a son. The town women told Naomi, "Praise be to the Lord, who gave you this grandson. He'll make you young again. He'll take care of you in your old age. Your daughter-in-law, who has given him birth, loves you. She's better to you than seven sons."

Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him (Ru 4:13-16).

The neighborhood women called him, "Naomi's baby boy." But, his name was Obed. Obed was Jesse's father, and Jesse was the father of David (Ru 4:17-22).

### GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

1. What catches your attention in the story?
2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand?
3. Who are the main characters in the story?
4. What problems did the characters face?
5. How did the characters face their problems?
6. How have you faced similar problems?
7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you?
8. What does the story tell about God?

### SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What problems did Naomi and Ruth face that required them to make forced adaptations?
2. What forced adaptations did Naomi and Ruth face?
3. How were Ruth's actions and attitudes different than Naomi's?
4. How did Boaz help Ruth?
5. What does Ruth's story teach us about dealing with immigrants?
6. How can Ruth's story help you when you face crisis that force you to make new adaptations?
7. How can Ruth's story help you to help a person in need?

## LIFE-LESSONS

1. **Tragedies are a reality of life.** A famine occurred in the days when judges ruled Israel (Ru 1:1). Elimelech died and left Naomi a widow (Ru 1:3). Naomi's two sons died and she was left without a husband and without children (Ru 1:4-5). Naomi's daughters-in-law became widows.
2. **Tragedy brings forced adaptations.** The famine caused Elimelech's family to migrate to the country of Moab (Ru 1:1-2). The deaths of Naomi's husband and two sons left her in a foreign country, without protection and without support (Ru 1:5). Naomi decided to return to her country where she had family (Ru 1:6). Her decision, forced her daughters-in-law to give up their home with her. They were forced to make a decision: go back to their parents' house or go with Naomi to a foreign country (Ru 1:8).
3. **Reaction to forced adaptation influences the outcome of restructuring one's life.** Bitterness was Naomi's reaction (Ru 1:13, 20). Orpha's reaction was to resume the life that was best for her. She said goodbye to Naomi and went back to her parents (Ru 1:14). Ruth restructured her life with commitments and determination. She committed herself to stay with Naomi (Ru 1:16-17) and to get food (Ru 2:2). She was persistent in harvesting grain (Ru 2:6-7). She was committed to protecting her reputation (Ru 3:11).
4. **People faced with forced adaptations are usually vulnerable and unprotected.** Ruth went to the field to gather grain and she was at risk of being raped (Ru 2:22). She was unable to protect herself, and she was grateful when Boaz offered her protection (Ru 2:9-14).
5. **All people can become a part of the family of God, regardless of race, sex, or national background.** Ruth was a poor foreigner who belonged to a race that was despised by Israel. Boaz was a rich Jew. Ruth was blessed because of her faithfulness. She and Boaz were the great-grandparents of King David and direct ancestors of Jesus (Ru 4:17-22). Today, people of different races, nations and social levels can be part of the family of God through faith in Jesus.
6. **People cannot be fully aware of God's purpose for their lives on earth; however, in eternity all is revealed.** The events recorded in Ruth were part of God's preparation for the births of David and Jesus. Ruth was unaware of this larger purpose in her life.

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

### **Interactive Sharing:**

The famine caused Elimelech's family to migrate to the country of Moab. The deaths of Elimelech and Naomi's two sons left her in a foreign country, with neither protection nor support. Naomi decided to return to her country, where she had family. Her decision forced her daughters-in-law to give up their home with her. They were forced to make a decision: go back to their parents' house or go with Naomi to a foreign country.

- Invite listeners to share similar experiences where they experienced tragic experiences that brought forced adaptations.
- Invite listeners who are experiencing a tragedy to get in the center of a circle. Others gather around and pray for those inside the circle. Pray that they will not become bitter like Naomi, but will restructure their lives like Ruth, with commitments and determination. Pray for them to have God's wisdom to make the best adaptations.