



The Life of **Ruth**



**THE MOABITE FOREIGNER WHO
FOLLOWED GOD & LEFT AN ENDURING LEGACY
OF FAITH & LOYALTY**



International Fellowship
of Christians and Jews®

The Life of Ruth



LESSON 1

Ruth Marries Naomi's Son



SCRIPTURE TO READ **Ruth 1:1–10**

Women played many key roles at critical times in Israel's history—and none more so than Ruth. She appeared on the scene during a dark time in Israel some 400 years after the time of Jacob. This era was the days of the judges (see Judges 21:25), when people faithful to God were hard to find. Ruth is also set against a dark background of famine in Israel and death in a foreign land. The famine led a Jewish man named Elimelech (whose name means “my God is king”) to take his wife Naomi (“pleasant, lovely”) and their sons, Mahlon and Kilion, and leave Israel in search of food.

The family traveled from Bethlehem, about five miles south of Jerusalem, to the land of Moab, 50 miles east on the opposite side of the Dead Sea. The events that unfolded during the family's 10 years in Moab show that this was not a wise decision. All the men in Naomi's family had died by the time the famine in Israel ended. Naomi decided to go back to Bethlehem, and told her Moabite daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, to go home to their own families.

THINK ABOUT IT

The saga of Ruth is a classic example of God's power to overcome our human limitations and adverse circumstances and turn hardships into blessing.

At the same time, the expressions of loyalty that Orpah and Ruth made to Naomi remind us of the importance of family and of honoring the vows we have made, whatever the cost.

GOING DEEPER

1. It is likely that Elimelech planned to be in Moab for just a short time. Read Deuteronomy 23:3–6 and explain why Moab was not a land where Israelites would feel welcome.

2. Naomi asked God to show “*kindness*” to Orpah (Ruth 1:8). Kindness is the Hebrew word *chesed*, meaning God’s loyal, covenant love. What clue does Naomi’s prayer give us about Orpah’s relationship to the God of Israel?

3. Why was Naomi so concerned that both Orpah and Ruth go where they had the best chance to “*find rest*” (v. 9) by marrying again?

4. It is clear that Naomi loved both Orpah and Ruth, and they loved her, too. Why do you think they insisted on staying with Naomi after their husbands’ deaths?

The Life of Ruth



LESSON 2

Ruth Declares Her Faith



SCRIPTURE TO READ **Ruth 1:11–22**

A tearful scene of three widows hugging and saying their good-byes hardly sounds like the start of a great love story. But in the case of Ruth, that is exactly what it was. Naomi was on the road back to Bethlehem with Orpah and Ruth (1:6–7) when she turned to them and urged them to let her go on while they went back to their families in Moab. Naomi spelled out the grim future that she believed awaited her in Bethlehem, and she wished better for her daughters-in-law.

Orpah stayed in Moab, but Ruth pleaded to go to Bethlehem with Naomi, saying, “*Your people will be my people, and your God my God*” (v. 16). Thus Ruth aligned herself and her fate with Israel—much as “righteous Gentiles” like Oskar Schindler and Corrie ten Boom did by saving Jews during the Holocaust. Naomi felt that God had made her life hard, and when she arrived back in Bethlehem she told the women to call her “Mara,” or “bitter.” But once back in the Promised Land, Naomi and Ruth began to see the loving hand of God turn despair into hope.

THINK ABOUT IT

Naomi believed it was impossible for Ruth to have a hopeful future in Bethlehem. But Ruth had already declared her allegiance to the God of Israel, about whom Jeremiah said, “*Sovereign LORD . . . nothing is too hard for you.*” (Jeremiah 32:17).

Turning despair into hope was not too hard for God in the lives of Naomi and Ruth, and He can do the same for you today.

GOING DEEPER

1. Why did Naomi feel it was important for Orpah and Ruth to understand that she herself was too old to consider marrying again?

2. Ruth understood that, humanly speaking, nothing but hardship awaited her if she went to Bethlehem with Naomi. Why was Ruth so determined to go with Naomi?

3. Why did the women of Bethlehem express such surprise and shock the first time they saw Naomi after her return?

4. The story of Ruth is full of seeming coincidences that reveal God's hand at work. Why does the Bible note that Ruth and Naomi arrived in Bethlehem just in time for the fall harvest?

The Life of Ruth



LESSON 3

Boaz Meets and Blesses Ruth



SCRIPTURE TO READ **Ruth 2:1–12**

It takes two to complete a love story, and so the writer of the Book of Ruth quickly introduced readers to Boaz, a prominent man in Bethlehem. His barley fields were among those being harvested, and “*as it turned out*” (v.3), Ruth wound up gleaning in those very fields. The language emphasizes the unseen hand of God guiding the events, for we are to understand that the reason things turned out this way was not chance, but God’s providence.

The first meeting between Ruth and Boaz revealed a lot about their character. Boaz treated Ruth with honor as the woman of loyalty and integrity that she was, and Ruth expressed deep gratitude for Boaz’s kindness. Boaz’s reference to all that Ruth had left behind in Moab, and his prayer for God’s blessing on Ruth, underscore the fact that Ruth had put her future and her faith in the hands of the God of Israel.

THINK ABOUT IT

Many times, what seems to us to be chance occurrences or amazing coincidences are in reality the hand of God’s providence at work in our lives.

Like Ruth and Boaz, our responsibility is to act with faith and integrity in the circumstances we find ourselves in, which puts us in line for God’s blessing.

GOING DEEPER

1. What does Ruth's gleaning in the fields of Boaz reveal about her and Naomi's financial condition? (Hint: read Leviticus 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19–22.)

2. The greeting Boaz gave to his workers indicates that he was a man of faith. In what ways did his actions toward Ruth prove the reality of his faith?

3. Can you find a clue in these verses that Boaz was actually quite a bit older than Ruth? (Hint: read Ruth 3:10.)

4. Ruth was amazed that Boaz even noticed her, but he was well acquainted with her story. How did his blessing reassure Ruth that she and Naomi would be fine?

The Life of Ruth



LESSON 4

Boaz Provides for and Protects Ruth



SCRIPTURE TO READ **Ruth 2:13–23**

Ruth must have been encouraged by Boaz’s kind greeting. But it did not make her forget that as far as the people around her were concerned, she was a foreigner who had no right to claim any favorable treatment. That was not a problem for Ruth, though, because Boaz was already treating her like a member of his family.

Boaz certainly knew that Naomi and Ruth were in poor financial condition. In the ancient world, being poor did not mean simply being unable to afford a few luxuries here and there, or a nicer house. Poverty often meant not having enough to eat on any given day. This is why Boaz made sure Ruth had enough to eat and plenty to take back to Naomi. When Naomi saw that Ruth returned with about a bushel of grain, enough for many days’ meals, she began to realize that their fortunes were going to change.

THINK ABOUT IT

Ruth was grateful for every kindness shown to her, no matter how small. Her “attitude of gratitude” is a great example for us to follow.

Naomi also recognized God’s goodness to her family and was quick to offer a prayer of blessing on the person who had given her and Ruth new hope. Is there someone you need to thank today?

GOING DEEPER

1. How did Ruth's response to Boaz (v. 13) indicate that she saw his kindness as an answer to his prayer for her blessing?

2. How did Naomi's reaction in 2:19–20 contrast to her attitude when she first returned from Moab to Bethlehem?

3. Naomi knew Boaz to be one of her late husband's close relatives. How did that fact raise Naomi's hopes for herself and Ruth? (Read Leviticus 25:25–55 to learn about the obligations of the closest relative, also called the guardian-redeemer.)

4. The last verse of Ruth 2 adds another small element of drama to the story. What did the end of the harvest season mean for people who got their food by gleaning?

The Life of Ruth



LESSON 5

Ruth Makes a Marriage Proposal



SCRIPTURE TO READ **Ruth 3:1–18**

The kindness Boaz showed Naomi and Ruth made Naomi realize this was a chance to arrange a secure future for Ruth. Naomi was acting within her rights to send Ruth to Boaz with the suggestion that he act on his role as the family's kinsman-redeemer. Deuteronomy 25:7–10 gives a widow in situations like this the right to take the initiative when her male relative was not fulfilling his obligation.

Boaz knew what Ruth was proposing, and he was delighted that she was willing to marry him even though he was older. He was obviously attracted to Ruth's beauty and honorable character, and readily stated his willingness to take the kinsman-redeemer role. But then this love story took a dramatic twist. Unknown to Naomi, there was a closer family member who had to be given the opportunity to marry Ruth and acquire any property involved. Naomi didn't know what the outcome would be, but she knew Boaz would get the issue settled quickly.

THINK ABOUT IT

Sordid love stories are so common today, both in real life and in entertainment, that it is refreshing to read about two people who acted with honor and faithfulness toward each other.

Let the story of Ruth and Boaz serve as a reminder to us of the need for honesty and purity in all of our relationships.

GOING DEEPER

1. Naomi told Ruth to uncover Boaz's feet while he slept. Why was Naomi confident that Boaz would not take advantage of Ruth?

2. Naomi sent Ruth to Boaz at the threshing floor for a legitimate and honorable reason. How did Boaz's response vindicate Naomi's confidence in his godly character?

3. The imagery of spreading a garment over someone symbolized marriage (see Ezekiel 16:8). How did Boaz's answer reveal his desire to see Ruth cared for, whatever it might take?

4. What plan did Boaz suggest to Ruth so that her coming to him at night would not be discovered and perhaps lead to false rumors?

5. Explain how the gift of "*six measures of barley*" that Boaz gave to Ruth and Naomi helped to assure Naomi that he would take care of the situation.

The Life of Ruth



LESSON 6

Boaz Speaks up for Ruth



SCRIPTURE TO READ **Ruth 4:1–10**

No Hollywood producer could have scripted a happier ending to a love story than the final chapter of Ruth. There was even a dramatic twist in the plot that could have radically altered the outcome. Even though Boaz loved Ruth, he had to step aside and give another relative the opportunity to marry Ruth if he chose to do so. He gathered 10 elders from Bethlehem to act as official witnesses in the case he was about to bring to his relative's attention.

It is interesting that Boaz began by mentioning the land involved in the redemption process. Perhaps he felt that if he started out this way, by the time he got around to mentioning Ruth, the other man would be intimidated by the scope of the “deal.” Whatever Boaz’s plan was, it worked. The other relative passed the right of redemption and marriage on to Boaz, and they sealed the agreement with an ancient version of “signing on the dotted line.”

THINK ABOUT IT

The book of Ruth is filled with examples of the providence of God —
His guiding hand that may not always be seen, but is always at work.

If you are waiting for a problem to be resolved, or a hard circumstance to be reversed, follow Boaz’s example. Do what you know is right, and trust God to work in the situation, even when you cannot see His hand at work in your life.

GOING DEEPER

1. The law of levirate marriage (taken from a Latin term meaning “husband’s brother”) is described in Deuteronomy 25:5–10. Why was it important that a dead person’s name and inheritance be kept alive in Israel?

2. How would buying Naomi’s property and marrying Ruth “endanger” the other relative’s own estate?

3. What indication do you see in verse 9 that Naomi’s dead family members had not been forgotten?

4. Boaz had acted in accordance with the Law of Moses. How important was it to his and Ruth’s future that Boaz obey the law and not try to take matters into his own hands?

The Life of Ruth



LESSON 7

Ruth Marries Boaz and Has a Son



SCRIPTURE TO READ **Ruth 4:11–22**

One of the Bible’s most beautiful stories comes to a fitting end. The elders of Bethlehem recognized God’s hand at work and pronounced a blessing on Ruth and Boaz. It seems that the greatest joy was Naomi’s, because the birth of Obed (meaning “servant”) reversed the family’s desperate situation. The Bible is careful to note that it was God who gave this child to Boaz and Ruth. Naomi’s “bitter” sojourn in Moab and blessing upon returning to Bethlehem, along with Ruth’s status as a foreigner who was not part of the congregation of the Lord, remind us that we are never so far away from God that we cannot return to Him. What’s more, God loves us even in the midst of hardship and hopelessness, and He is able to bless us despite our circumstances.

Calling Ruth “better than seven sons” was the highest compliment the women of Bethlehem could have paid her. This remarkable woman from Moab was a worthy addition to the Messianic line of David—which is a key point of the story. The Book of Ruth is not just the account of people who acted faithfully in Israel during the faithless days of the judges. It is also the story of how God rewarded that faithfulness by bringing from Ruth’s and Boaz’s line the great king, David. David would not only bring Israel to its days of greatest glory, but also foreshadow the coming of the nation’s greatest Kinsman-Redeemer, the Messiah.

THINK ABOUT IT

It is exciting to read time and again how God did the seemingly impossible in Ruth’s life. But when it comes to our own lives, we are often tempted to think, “That was then, and this is now.”

Are you facing an obstacle that seems impossible to remove, or a problem that appears too big to solve? God can make a way where there seems to be no way, so keep trusting Him.

GOING DEEPER

1. The elders prayed Ruth would become like Rachel and Leah, the mothers of Israel's 12 tribes. In what way did Ruth play a significant role as a mother and matriarch in Israel?

2. Do you think the reference to God's activity in regard to Obed's birth means simply that Ruth was unable to conceive? If not, what else could the writer be referring to?

3. What term did the women of Bethlehem use (Ruth 4:17) to describe the close relationship that Naomi felt to Obed?

4. What can we learn from the story of Ruth that will help us during those times when our circumstances seem bitter and it appears that God has forgotten about us?

The Life of Ruth



Answer Key



Lesson 1

1. The people of Moab had mistreated the Israelites on their Exodus journey, and hired a false prophet to try and curse them. God had commanded Israel not to seek friendship with Moabites.
2. It is likely that Naomi would not have asked God to show His covenant kindness to Orpah if the latter had not become a worshiper of the true God.
3. Naomi believed that neither Orpah nor Ruth would have much chance of finding a husband who could provide for her back in Bethlehem.
4. Besides their love for Naomi, Orpah and Ruth probably felt as alone as Naomi did and wanted to stay with the mother of their late husbands, a person who had come to mean a lot to them.
3. It was either because Naomi had aged considerably after her hardships in Moab, or because she was returning without her husband and sons. It may also have been Naomi's sad and distressed appearance as one for whom life had turned "bitter."
4. It was because of the harvest that Ruth would meet Boaz and discover God's wonderful plan for her future security and blessing.

Lesson 3

Lesson 2

1. Naomi wanted her daughters-in-law to understand that she was never going to have any more sons who would grow up to marry them—an impossibility that Naomi may have suggested to dramatize her plight and encourage Orpah and Ruth to stay in Moab.
2. We know that Ruth loved Naomi, but more than that Ruth had become a devoted follower of the God of Israel and wanted to go where He was worshiped.
1. The poor were the ones who had to glean for their food in other people's fields. Naomi and Ruth were in dire financial condition when they arrived in Bethlehem.
2. Boaz not only acted with kindness, generosity, and integrity toward Ruth, but he also blessed Ruth for her faith in the God of Israel, a faith Boaz obviously appreciated deeply.
3. Boaz referred to Ruth as a "young woman" and "my daughter," which is unlikely if he were her age. Later, he expressed gratitude that she had not gone after a younger man.
4. Boaz's prayer for God's blessing on Ruth for her faith must have reminded and reassured her that God would take care of her and Naomi—especially since the imagery of God's protective "wings" suggested His tender care for His people.

Lesson 4

1. Ruth was amazed and very grateful that Boaz took notice of her and was kind to her, since Ruth felt that she was not even worthy of being treated like one of Boaz's servants.
2. In contrast to her earlier lament and bitterness over her hard life and losses, Naomi was now praising God for His goodness to her and her family.
3. Naomi had to have been well aware of the law of levirate marriage, which meant that Boaz was a candidate to marry Ruth.
4. The end of the harvest season would normally be a hard time for the poor, since one of their prime sources of food would not be available again for some months.

Lesson 5

1. Naomi knew Boaz to be a man of outstanding integrity who would not only treat Ruth honorably, but follow up on any legal and moral obligation he had to her and Naomi.
2. Boaz did just what Naomi believed he would do, which was assure Ruth that he would pursue the issue of levirate marriage the very next morning.
3. Boaz was willing to see that Ruth was provided for according to the Mosaic Law, even if it meant Ruth marrying the other kinsman and not him.
4. Boaz suggested that Ruth leave before the morning light so that no one would recognize her and get the wrong idea about her relationship with Boaz.
5. These six measures of barley were enough for many meals, and also acted as a hint or "down payment" of more good things to come.

Lesson 6

1. God wanted to make sure that a dead person's family would continue to have a presence and inheritance in Israel. This also prevented the land from being sold permanently, a provision that God used to teach His people that He was the true "owner" of the land and not them.
2. Taking on a second wife with her mother-in-law, as well as her land and whatever debts she may have, would obviously leave less income and inheritance for this man's own family.
3. For the first time since Elimelech, Kilion, and Mahlon were introduced over ten years earlier, their names were mentioned as the ones on whose behalf Boaz was acting.
4. It was absolutely critical that Boaz rest his case in God's hands, even though it appeared that he might lose Ruth. If Boaz had tried to win Ruth by manipulation, their relationship would have been tarnished legally and morally—a situation God could not have blessed.

Lesson 7

1. Ruth became a highly honored mother in Israel by giving birth to Obed, who would become the grandfather of King David, thus placing Ruth in the line of Israel's Messiah.
2. The text seems to indicate that Ruth's conception was not a matter of her being barren, but that God took a direct hand in blessing her and Boaz by giving her this child.
3. Obed was like a son to Naomi—and since Ruth's marriage was according to levirate law, in one important sense Obed was a son to Naomi in that Boaz was acting in behalf of her deceased husband, Elimelech.
4. We can learn that no matter what loss or hardship we have suffered, and no matter how hopeless the future looks, God still loves us and His ability to bless us is not limited by our circumstances.



RABBI YECHIEL ECKSTEIN



In 1983, Rabbi Eckstein founded the *International Fellowship of Christians and Jews* (*The Fellowship*), devoting his life to building bridges of understanding between Christians and Jews and broad support for the State of Israel.

He is an internationally respected Bible teacher and acknowledged as the world's leading Jewish authority on evangelical Christians.

Under his leadership, *The Fellowship* now raises over \$125 million annually, making it the largest Christian-supported humanitarian nonprofit working in Israel today.

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