

Ruth

Women in the Bible

"This is a story of a family loyalty and loyalty to God and to his laws. It is set in the same period as Judges. The central character, Ruth, was not an Israelite, but came to believe in God, and through her marriage to an Israelite Boaz, became the Great grandmother of David and an ancestor of Jesus".

Holy Bible New international Version

The history lies in the period of the Judges (Ruth 1:1), at the close of a great famine in the land of Israel. Elimelech, a native of Bethlehem, had, with his wife Naomi and two sons, taken refuge in Moab from the famine. There, after an interval of time which is not more precisely defined, he died (Ruth 1:3), and his two sons, having married women of Moab, in the course of a further ten years also died, and left Orpah and Ruth widows (Ruth 1:5). Naomi then decided to return to Palestine, and her two daughters-in-law accompanied her on her way (Ruth 1:7). Orpah, however, turned back and only Ruth remained with Naomi, journeying with her to Bethlehem, where they arrived "in the beginning of barley harvest" (Ruth 1:22). The piety and fidelity of Ruth are thus early exhibited in the course of the narrative, in that she refused to abandon her mother-in-law, although thrice exhorted to do so by Naomi herself, on account of her own great age and the better prospects for Ruth in her own country. Orpah yielded to persuasion, and returned to Moab; but Ruth remained with Naomi.

At Bethlehem Ruth employed herself in gleaning in the field during the harvest and was noticed by Boaz, the owner of the field, a near kinsman of her father-in-law Elimelech. Boaz gave her permission to glean as long as the harvest continued; and told her that he had heard of her filial conduct toward her mother-in-law. Moreover, he directed the reapers to make intentional provision for her by dropping in her way grain from their bundles (Ruth 2:15 f). She was thus able to return to Naomi in the evening with a whole ephah of barley (Ruth 2:17). In answer to questioning she explained that her success in gleaning was due to the good-will of Boaz, and the orders that he had given. She remained accordingly and gleaned with his maidens throughout the barley and wheat harvest, making her home with her mother-in-law (Ruth 2:23). Naomi was anxious for the remarriage of Ruth, both for her sake and to secure compliance with the usage and law of Israel; and sent her to Boaz to recall to him his duty as near kinsman of her late husband Elimelech (Ruth 3:1 f). Boaz acknowledged the claim and promised to take Ruth in marriage, failing fulfillment of the legal duty of another whose relationship was nearer than that of Boaz himself (Ruth 3:8-13). Naomi was confident that Boaz would fulfill his promise, and advised Ruth to wait in patience.

Boaz then adopted the customary and legal measures to obtain a decision. He summoned the near kinsman before ten elders at the gate of the city, related to him the circumstances of Naomi's return, with her desire that Ruth should be married and settled with her father-in-law's land as her marriage-portion, and called upon him to declare his intentions. The near kinsman, whose name and degree of relationship are not stated, declared his inability to undertake the charge, which he renounced in legal form in favour of Boaz according to ancient custom in Israel (Ruth 4:6 ff). Boaz accepted the charge thus transferred to him, the elders and bystanders bearing witness and pronouncing a formal blessing upon the union of Boaz and Ruth (4:9-12). Upon the birth of a son in due course the women of the city congratulated Naomi, in that the continuance of her family and house was now assured, and the latter became the child's nurse. The name of Obed was given to the boy; and Obed through his son Jesse became the grandfather of David.

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (Public domain)

Life is full of choices. Ruth could have chosen to say goodbye to her elderly mother-in-law Naomi, about-turn and go with Orpah to her mother's home in Moab. Naomi, a widow, is grieving over the loss of her two sons. Her bereavement has made her bitter; she has lost her faith in God. Ruth is also grieving and her future is uncertain, however staying in Moab it was likely that in time she could remarry and set up a new home. Naomi appeals to Ruth, three times, for her to leave her. But Ruth answered,

“Entreat me not to leave thee,
Or to return from following after thee:
For whither thou goest,
I will go;
And where thou lodgest,
I will lodge.
Thy people shall be my people,
And thy God my God.
Where thou diest, will I die,
And there will I be buried.

The Lord do so to me, and more also,
If ought but death part thee and me.”

(From THE BIBLE, THE BOOK OF RUTH)



Ruth meets Boaz (engraving by Merian, Matthaeus the Elder, circa 1630)

Ruth 2:20 "The Lord bless him!" Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. "He has not stopped showing kindness to the living and the dead" she added, "That man is our close relative: he is one of our kinsman-redeemers" ...she is referring to Boaz.

This verse seems to mirror the philosophy of Ruth, who must have been devastated with not only her husband dying, but lived with her mother in law's grief and that of her sister in law. She showed compassion and loyalty for the family she had married into, by continuing to love and support her mother in law, which would have been what her dead husband would have wished.

God blessed Ruth with a very thoughtful husband, Boaz, as a result of her loyalty to the clan of Elimelech, from who Naomi's husband came from, and with the ultimate blessing of a baby for Ruth, Naomi's life also became fruitful once more in that she became a highly thought of grandmother and nurse for the new baby, Obed, (a kinsman redeemer). Later Obed became father of Jesse, the father of David. And Ruth had restored Naomi's faith in God. Through Ruth's actions the family's land remained in their possession also.

From this story we can see if we show loyalty, care and love, to our families and God, we too will be blessed.

David Clarke