

# RUTH

## *Introduction*

*The book of Ruth is a jewel of Hebrew narrative. Ruth, the Moabite foreigner, will be the great-grandmother of King David, through her wedding to Boaz, a rich farmer from Bethlehem. Out of this story, that probably has a historical root, a beautiful model to trust on God is made; God's piety extends even to a foreigner, because of his goodness and fidelity.*

## **The foreigner girl**

**1** <sup>1</sup>There was a famine in the land during the time of the Judges, and a man from Bethlehem in Judah departed with his wife and two sons to sojourn in the country of Moab. <sup>2</sup>The man was Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and his two sons Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. A little later, after they had settled in Moab. <sup>3</sup>Naomi's husband Elimelech died. She was left with her two sons, <sup>4</sup>who married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth.

After living in Moab for about ten years, <sup>5</sup>Mahlon and Chilion also died and Naomi was left bereft of husband and two sons. <sup>6</sup>Having heard that Yahweh had come to help his people by giving them food, Naomi prepared to return home. <sup>7</sup>With her two daughters-in-law, she took the road back to Judah.

<sup>8</sup>It was then that Naomi said to her daughters-in-law:

—Go back, each of you, to your mother's house. And may Yahweh be kind to you, as you have been to your dead and to me. <sup>9</sup>May he also grant each of you rest in the home of another husband.

She kissed them goodbye. But they wept aloud <sup>10</sup>and said to her:

—No, we will go back with you to your people.

<sup>11</sup>Naomi said:

—Return home, my daughters. Why should you come with me?

<sup>14</sup>Again they sobbed and wept. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

<sup>15</sup>Naomi said:

—Look, your sister-in-law returns to her people and her gods. You too must return. Go after her.

<sup>16</sup>Ruth replied:

—Don't ask me to leave you. For I will go where you go and stay where you stay. Your people will be my people and your god, my God. <sup>17</sup>Where you die, there will I die and be buried. May Yahweh deal with me severely if anything except death separates us.

<sup>18</sup>Realizing that Ruth was determined to go with her, Naomi stopped urging her.

<sup>19</sup>So the two went on till they reached Bethlehem. Their arrival set the town astir. Women asked:

—Can this be Naomi?

## **The rich man from town**

**2** <sup>1</sup>Naomi had a well-to-do kinsman, Boaz, from the clan of her husband Elimelech. <sup>2</sup>And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi:

—Let me go to pick up the left-over grain in the field whose owner will allow me that favor.

Naomi said:

—Go ahead, my daughter.

<sup>3</sup>So she went to glean in the fields behind the harvesters. It happened that the field she entered belonged to Boaz of the clan of Elimelech.

<sup>4</sup>When Boaz came from Bethlehem, he greeted the harvesters:

—Yahweh be with you.

They returned the greeting:

—Yahweh bless you.

<sup>5</sup>Noticing Ruth, Boaz asked the foreman of his harvesters:

—To whom does that young woman belong?

<sup>6</sup>The foreman replied:

—She is the Moabite who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. <sup>7</sup>She came this morning and asked leave to glean behind the harvesters. Since then she has been working without a moment's rest.

<sup>8</sup>Boaz said to Ruth:

—Listen, my daughter. Don't go away from here to glean in anyone else's field. Stay here with my women servants. <sup>9</sup>See where the harvesters are and follow behind. I have ordered the men not to molest you. They have filled some jars with water. Go there and drink when you are thirsty. <sup>10</sup>Bowing down with her face to the ground, she exclaimed:

—Why have I, a foreigner, found such favor in your eyes?

<sup>11</sup>Boaz answered:

—I have been told all about you: what you have done for your mother-in-law since your husband's death, how you have gone with her, leaving your own father and mother and homeland, to live with a people you knew nothing about before you came here. <sup>12</sup>May Yahweh reward you for this! May you receive full recompense from Yahweh, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!

<sup>13</sup>Ruth said:

—May I prove worthy of your favor, my lord. You have consoled your servant with your kind words, though I am not the equal of your maidservants.

<sup>14</sup>Boaz called her at mealtime:

—Come over, have some bread and dip it in the wine.

As she sat among the reapers, he handed her some roasted grain. She ate her fill and had some left over.

<sup>15</sup>When she rose to glean, Boaz instructed his men:

—Let her glean even among the sheaves and do not scold her. <sup>16</sup>And pull some stalks from the bundles; leave them scattered for her to glean.

<sup>17</sup>She worked until evening and when she threshed what she had gleaned it amounted to about an ephah.

<sup>18</sup>Ruth carried back to town the threshed barley, which she showed to her mother-in-law. She also gave her what she had left over from lunch.

<sup>19</sup>Naomi asked her daughter-in-law:

—Where did you glean today? Where did you work? May the man who took notice of you be blessed.

Ruth told her mother-in-law about the owner of the field where she had worked.

Ruth said:

—His name is Boaz.

<sup>20</sup>Naomi exclaimed:

—May Yahweh bless him! God indeed is merciful both to the living and the dead. This man is a close relative, one with a right of redemption over us.

<sup>21</sup>Ruth continued:

—He even told me to stay with his servants until they finish harvesting the grain.

<sup>22</sup>Naomi said:

—It will be better for you, my daughter, to go out with his maidservants than to go working in some other field where harm might come to you.

<sup>23</sup>Ruth, therefore, stayed close to the maidservants of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the wheat and barley harvests. And she continued living with her mother-in-law.

## The night on the threshing floor

**3**<sup>9</sup>Boaz asked:

—Who are you?

The answer came:

—I am Ruth, your servant. Spread the corner of your cloak over me for you are a kinsman who has right of redemption over me.

<sup>10</sup>Boaz said:

—May Yahweh bless you, my daughter! This kindness of yours now is even greater than that which you have shown earlier, for you have not gone after young men, rich or poor. <sup>11</sup>Have no fear, my daughter; I will do for you all that you ask, since all my townsmen know that you are a worthy woman. <sup>12</sup>It is true that I am a close relative, but there is another still closer. <sup>13</sup>Stay here for the night. In the morning, if he wants to claim you—good! But if not—as surely as Yahweh lives—I will claim you myself. Lie here till morning.

<sup>15</sup>Then turning to Ruth, Boaz said:

—Hold out the mantle you are wearing.

She did so and he poured into it six measures of barley. He helped her lift the bundle, then went back to town.

<sup>16</sup>Ruth returned home to her mother-in-law, who asked:

—How did you fare, my daughter?

She told her everything <sup>17</sup>and added:

—He gave me these six measures of barley because, as he said, he did not want me to go back to my mother-in-law empty-handed.

<sup>18</sup>Naomi said:

—Wait, my daughter, till you learn what happens, for he will not rest until it is settled today.

## The wedding

**4**<sup>1</sup>Meanwhile Boaz went to the town gate and sat there waiting for the closer relative about whom he had spoken to Ruth. When he saw him coming, he called him by name and said:

—Come here and sit down.

And so he did.

<sup>2</sup>Boaz picked out ten from the city elders and asked them to sit with them, which they did. <sup>3</sup>Then he said to the other man who also had right of redemption:

—Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our brother Elimelech. <sup>4</sup>I thought of bringing this matter to you before our elders here, because as the closer kin you have more right to lay claim to it. But if you have no wish to redeem it, let me know because I am next to you in line.

The man replied:

—I am willing to put in my claim. I will redeem it. <sup>5</sup>Boaz continued:

—If you buy the land from Naomi, you will also have to take the Moabite Ruth, widow of the late heir, and her sons will inherit the name and the land of the dead.

<sup>6</sup>The man said:

—Then I cannot redeem it, because I might endanger my own estate. Redeem it yourself.

<sup>7</sup>It used to be the custom in Israel that for a contract of redemption or exchange to become binding, one party had to take off his sandal and give it to the other. This act legalized transactions.

<sup>8</sup>So the man took off his sandal and said to Boaz:

—Buy it yourself.

<sup>9</sup>Boaz turned to the elders and all those present.

—This day you are witnesses that I buy from Naomi all the holdings of Elimelech, Chilion and Mahlon. <sup>10</sup>I also take Mahlon's widow, Ruth the Moabite, as my wife to raise up a family for her late husband, so that the name of the dead will be restored to his inheritance and be present among his brothers when they gather at the gate of his town. Do you witness this today?

<sup>11</sup>The elders and all those at the gate answered:

—We witness. May Yahweh make the woman coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you prosper in Ephrathah and be of good standing in Bethlehem. <sup>12</sup>And through the offspring Yahweh will give you by this woman, may your house become like that of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah.

<sup>13</sup>So Ruth was taken by Boaz and became his wife. Yahweh made her conceive and give birth to a son.

<sup>14</sup>The women said to Naomi:

—Blessed be Yahweh who has provided you today with an heir. May he become famous in Israel! <sup>15</sup>He will be your comfort and stay in your old age, for he is born of a daughter-in-law who loves you and is worth more than seven sons.

<sup>16</sup>Naomi took the child as her own and became his nurse. <sup>17</sup>And the women of the neighborhood gave him his name, saying:

—A son has been born for Naomi.

They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, who was David's father.