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Ruth and Naomi

Ruth 1:1–4:22 · Bud · Ages 9–12

The Book of Ruth is set in the days of the judges, a messy time in Israel's history. A famine drives Elimelech, his wife Naomi and their sons Mahlon and Chilion from Bethlehem to Moab, a neighboring nation east of the Dead Sea. Elimelech dies there. The sons marry Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth, and about ten years later both sons die. In that world, a widow with no sons had almost no protection.

When Naomi hears that God has ended the famine at home, she sets out for Bethlehem and urges her daughters-in-law to return to their families, where they might remarry. Orpah tearfully goes. Ruth refuses. She binds herself to Naomi for life with a solemn oath made in the Lord's name. Ruth, a foreigner, chooses Israel's God.

Back in Bethlehem the town is stirred to see Naomi, but she renames herself Mara, which means bitter. She feels God has let her come home with nothing.

It is the start of the barley harvest. Ruth goes out to glean, gathering the stalks left behind by the reapers, which Israel's law set aside for the poor, foreigners and widows (Lev 19:9–10; Deut 24:19). She happens to end up in the field of Boaz, a respected relative of Elimelech. Boaz has heard about her loyalty to Naomi. He protects her, feeds

her, quietly has his workers leave extra grain, and prays that the God of Israel will reward her faithfulness.

Naomi recognizes God's kindness at work. Boaz is one of the family's redeemers, a close relative with the duty to help a struggling family keep its land and its name. At Naomi's suggestion, Ruth goes to the threshing floor at night and asks Boaz to take her under his protection by marrying her. Boaz praises her goodness and loyalty, but explains that a nearer relative has the first right. In the morning he settles it at the town gate before the elders. The other man gives up his claim, and Boaz marries Ruth.

God gives them a son, Obed. The women of Bethlehem praise God, who has given Naomi a family again, and Naomi cares for the child. The book ends with a family line: Obed is the father of Jesse, and Jesse is the father of David. Matthew's Gospel names Ruth in the family tree of Jesus (Mt 1:5).

Ruth shows faithful, loyal love, and it shows God working quietly through ordinary kindness.

Talk about it

1. What did Ruth promise Naomi, and why was it such a big choice?
2. How did Israel's law help poor people like Ruth and Naomi?
3. Where do you see God working in this story, even though he does no big miracles?

Key verse: Ruth 1:16. Look it up in your Bible.