

Ruth

The Book of Ruth is a poignant narrative set during the time of the Judges in Israel, a period marked by social and moral chaos. It tells the story of Naomi, a widow from Bethlehem, and her Moabite daughter-in-law, Ruth. After the death of her husband and sons, Naomi decides to return to Bethlehem from Moab, urging her daughters-in-law to stay in their homeland. Orpah, one of the daughters-in-law, decides to stay, but Ruth, in a profound act of loyalty, pledges to accompany Naomi, declaring that Naomi's people and God will be hers as well.

Upon returning to Bethlehem, Ruth and Naomi face the challenges of poverty. Ruth takes initiative to provide for them by gleaning in the fields of Boaz, a wealthy relative of Naomi's deceased husband. Boaz notices Ruth's dedication and kindness and ensures her safety and provision while she gleans. Naomi, recognizing Boaz as a potential kinsman-redeemer—a role in which a relative marries a widow to preserve the family line—encourages Ruth to seek Boaz's protection and marriage. Ruth follows Naomi's advice and approaches Boaz, who agrees to take on the role of redeemer after resolving a legal matter with a closer relative.

The story culminates in the marriage of Ruth and Boaz, leading to the birth of their son, Obed, who becomes the grandfather of King David, linking Ruth to the lineage of Jesus Christ. This narrative highlights themes of loyalty, redemption, and divine providence, showing how God works through the faithfulness of ordinary people to fulfill His greater purposes. The Book of Ruth is celebrated for its portrayal of strong female characters and its message that faithfulness and love transcend ethnic and social boundaries.

"In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land.... the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them..."



Ruth 1 sets the stage for a narrative of loyalty, loss, and providence. It begins during a time of famine in Judah, prompting Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, to leave their home in Bethlehem and seek refuge in Moab. Tragically, Elimelech dies shortly after their arrival, leaving Naomi with her sons who eventually marry Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. Over the course of about ten years, both sons also die, leaving Naomi bereft of her immediate family and with two daughters-in-law in a foreign land.

Faced with these profound losses and hearing that the famine in Judah has ended, Naomi decides to return to Bethlehem. She urges Orpah and Ruth to remain in Moab and find new husbands, as she cannot offer them a future. Orpah reluctantly agrees and returns to her family, but Ruth demonstrates remarkable loyalty and devotion. She famously declares her commitment to Naomi, saying, "Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God" (Ruth 1:16). This vow marks a pivotal moment, showcasing Ruth's steadfastness and her willingness to embrace Naomi's people and faith as her own.

Upon their return to Bethlehem, Naomi is greeted by the townspeople who are surprised to see her. She expresses her bitterness over her losses, asking to be called "Mara," which means "bitter," instead of Naomi, which means "pleasant." Despite her grief, the chapter ends on a hopeful note with Naomi and Ruth arriving at the beginning of the barley harvest, hinting at the providential opportunities that lie ahead. This chapter introduces the themes of loyalty, cultural transition, and divine providence, setting the stage for the unfolding story of redemption and blessing that will follow in the subsequent chapters.

*"Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side,... Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi,
"Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain..."*

In **Ruth 2**, the narrative continues from the previous chapter with Ruth, a Moabite widow, and her mother-in-law Naomi, an Israelite widow, who have returned to Bethlehem from Moab. The chapter introduces Boaz, a wealthy relative of Naomi's deceased husband, Elimelech. Ruth, seeking to provide for herself and Naomi, asks for permission to glean in the fields, a practice allowed for the poor in Israel to gather leftover grains after the harvesters. By divine providence, she ends up gleaning in the field of Boaz, who takes notice of her. Boaz inquires about Ruth and learns of her loyalty to Naomi and her decision to leave her homeland to support her mother-in-law. Impressed by her dedication, Boaz extends kindness to Ruth, allowing her to glean in his fields and ensuring her safety by instructing his workers not to harm her.

Boaz's generosity towards Ruth is evident as he invites her to eat with his workers and instructs them to leave extra grain for her to gather. Ruth is overwhelmed by Boaz's kindness and expresses her gratitude. Boaz acknowledges her sacrifice and prays for God's blessing upon her. The chapter highlights Boaz's role as a kinsman-redeemer, a concept in Israelite law where a close relative could help restore the rights of a family member in need. Ruth continues to glean in Boaz's fields throughout the barley and wheat harvests, accumulating a substantial amount of grain, which she brings back to Naomi. Naomi is surprised by the quantity of grain and upon learning that Boaz is the benefactor, she recognizes the potential for Boaz to fulfill the role of a redeemer for their family.

This chapter is significant in illustrating themes of kindness, providence, and redemption. Boaz's actions foreshadow the potential restoration and security he could provide for Ruth and Naomi. The chapter also emphasizes the cultural and legal practices of ancient Israel, such as the provision for the poor through gleaning and the responsibilities of a kinsman-redeemer. Ruth's story is a testament to her faith and determination, as well as the unfolding of God's plan through ordinary events and acts of kindness. The relationship between Ruth and Boaz sets the stage for the subsequent developments in the narrative, ultimately leading to the lineage of King David, and later, Jesus Christ.



"One day Ruth's mother-in-law Naomi said to her... go down to the threshing floor... When he lies down, note the place where he is lying... Then go... So she went down to the threshing floor."



Ruth 3 centers on Naomi's plan for Ruth to appeal to Boaz as a kinsman-redeemer. Naomi instructs Ruth to prepare herself, go to the threshing floor where Boaz is working, and wait until he has finished eating and drinking. She tells Ruth to uncover Boaz's feet after he falls asleep and lie down, assuring her that Boaz will then tell her what to do. Ruth obediently follows these instructions, demonstrating her trust in Naomi's wisdom and her willingness to take a bold step of faith.

In the middle of the night, Boaz wakes up startled to find Ruth lying at his feet. When he asks who she is, Ruth identifies herself and requests that he spread his cloak over her, a symbolic gesture asking him to act as her kinsman-redeemer. Boaz is deeply moved by Ruth's actions, praising her for her loyalty and virtue. He notes that she has not chased after younger men but has instead honored the customs of her adopted people. Boaz agrees to act as Ruth's kinsman-redeemer but informs her that there is a closer relative who has the first right to fulfill this role.

Boaz promises to settle the matter of Ruth's redemption the next day. He acts honorably throughout the encounter, protecting Ruth's reputation by ensuring she leaves before dawn. Before she goes, he gives her six measures of barley to take back to Naomi. Ruth returns home and reports everything to her mother-in-law, who is confident that Boaz will resolve the situation quickly. This chapter highlights the faith and character of both Ruth and Boaz as they navigate the customs of kinsman-redeemer marriage, setting the stage for the final resolution in chapter 4.

"Meanwhile Boaz went up to the town gate... Then Boaz announced... I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, Mahlon's widow, as my wife..."

Ruth 4 concludes the story of Ruth with themes of redemption, legacy, and divine providence. The chapter begins with Boaz, a relative of Naomi's deceased husband Elimelech, taking action to secure the future of Naomi and Ruth. Boaz approaches the city gate, a place where legal matters are settled, to discuss the redemption of Elimelech's land with a closer relative, who has the first right to redeem it. Initially, the unnamed relative is willing to redeem the land, but he withdraws upon learning that he must also marry Ruth, a Moabite widow, to maintain the family lineage. By relinquishing his right, he allows Boaz to step in as the kinsman-redeemer.

Boaz's actions are celebrated by the elders and people of Bethlehem, who bless his union with Ruth, hoping that she will be like Rachel and Leah, the matriarchs of Israel. This blessing underscores Ruth's integration into the Israelite community and highlights the theme of inclusion and acceptance. Boaz marries Ruth, and she gives birth to a son named Obed. The birth of Obed brings joy and restoration to Naomi, who had returned to Bethlehem in despair after losing her husband and sons. The women of the town acknowledge Ruth's loyalty and love, stating that she is better to Naomi than seven sons, a significant compliment in a patriarchal society.

The chapter concludes with a genealogy that connects Ruth and Boaz to King David, underscoring the importance of their story in the larger narrative of Israel's history. Obed becomes the grandfather of David, linking Ruth, a Moabite, to the royal lineage of Israel and ultimately to the lineage of Jesus Christ. This genealogy emphasizes God's providence and the unfolding of His plan through ordinary people and events. The story of Ruth and Boaz serves as a testament to the transformative power of love, faithfulness, and redemption, illustrating how God works through human relationships to fulfill His purposes.

