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Ruth

Ruth is the eighth book in our Bibles. It is just before the books that describe the reigns of Israel's kings. It was an important book in ancient Israel because it adds some encouraging information to the story about King David. Perhaps the book of Ruth is more interesting to someone who already knows the history of David's kingdom. But it also serves as an introduction to David. It is a story about David's great-grandmother named Ruth. The unusual thing about her is that she is a Moabite, which means that she is not a Jew. And as an immigrant, she faced many difficulties. In fact, according to the Law of Moses, she was not even supposed to be a part of God's people (Deut. 23:3; Neh. 13:1). But this book makes clear that God had a special purpose for her. Other important characters in this story are Ruth's mother-in-law Naomi and a man named Boaz, David's great-grandfather.

The book of Ruth is about famine, death and a dangerous journey. But the most important point of the story is how two faithful women prepared the way for the birth of two kings who would change the world. With great detail, this story tells how God carefully brought two people together for his purposes. It tells how he worked in their lives so that King David and finally King Jesus would be born. This important piece of God's plan deals with the relationship between two women. They are Ruth and Naomi, a daughter-in-law and her mother-in-law.

These two women both suffer the death of their husbands. Then they bravely face life without protection in a very dangerous ancient world. Their story illustrates how God's laws show his love and care for his people. God's commands to the people of Israel provided for these women's care. His instructions made a way for them to be protected within their families. But they had to depend on their relative Boaz to be faithful to God's law. That is the only way Ruth and Naomi would be able to complete God's plan.

In the book of Ruth, Naomi...

Loses her family in Moab but gains Ruth (1:1-18)

Returns with Ruth to Judah and struggles to survive (1:19 – 2:23)

Has a plan, and Ruth follows it (3:1-18)

Is saved by Boaz' faithfulness and sees Ruth get married (4:1-22)

Famine in Judah

1 Long ago, when Israel's leaders were called "judges", there was a famine in the land. So a man who lived in the town of Bethlehem in Judah left his home and took his wife and his two sons to the country of Moab. ²The man's name was Elimelech. His wife's name was Naomi, and his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They belonged to the family of Ephrathah from Bethlehem, but they went to the foreign land of Moab to live for a while.

³Later, Elimelech died, leaving Naomi alone with her two sons. ⁴The sons married women from Moab. One was named Orpah, and the other was named Ruth. After about ten years there, ⁵Mahlon and Kilion also died. So Naomi was left alone without her husband or her two sons.

Naomi Goes Home

⁶Naomi was still in Moab when she heard that the LORD had helped his people in Judah by giving them a good harvest. So she and her daughters-in-law prepared to leave Moab. ⁷She left the place where she had been living, and her two daughters-in-law went with her. They started travelling towards Judah.

⁸But before long, Naomi said to her daughters-in-law, “Go back home to your own mothers. I pray that the LORD will be as good to you as you have been to me and to my sons who are now gone. ⁹I pray that the LORD will give each of you a new husband and another good home.” As Naomi kissed her daughters-in-law goodbye, they all cried loudly.

¹⁰They said to her, “No, we will go back with you to your people.”

¹¹But Naomi said, “My daughters, go back home. Why do you want to go with me? I can’t have any more sons to be your husbands. ¹²Go home, my daughters. I’m too old to marry again. Even if I thought that was possible, I could not help you. Even if I got married tonight and had two sons, ¹³you would have to wait until they were grown men to marry them. Do you really want to be without husbands that long? No, my daughters, there is no need for you to suffer like me.* I am the one the LORD has turned against!”

¹⁴They all started crying again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth would not let go of her.

¹⁵Naomi said, “Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her own people and her gods. You should go with her.”

¹⁶But Ruth said, “Don’t force me to leave you and go back to my own people! Let me go with you. Wherever you go, I will go. Wherever you sleep, I will sleep. Your people will be my people. Your God will be my God. ¹⁷Where you die, I will die, and that is where I will be buried. May the LORD punish me if I let anything but death separate us.”

¹⁸When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped arguing.

The Homecoming

¹⁹So Naomi and Ruth travelled until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived, the people in town could not stop talking about them.† The women there said, “Is this really Naomi?”

²⁰But Naomi told the people, “You know my name means ‘Happy’.‡ But you should call me ‘Sad’¶ because God All-Powerful has made me suffer so much. ²¹When I left, I had everything I wanted, but now the LORD has brought me home with nothing. The LORD has decided to punish me, so why should I have a happy name like Naomi? God All-Powerful has filled my life with trouble.”

²²So Naomi returned from Moab with her daughter-in-law Ruth the Moabite. They arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

*1:13 *there is ... me* Or “because I am suffering more than you”.

†1:19 *the people ... them* Or “The whole town was stirred up over them.”

‡1:20 *You know ... ‘Happy’* Literally, “Don’t call me Naomi.” Naomi means “Pleasant” or “My joy”.

¶1:20 *Sad* Literally, “Mara”, which means “bitter”.

Ruth Meets Boaz

2 Now Naomi had a rich relative[§] named Boaz. He was a fine man from the same family as her husband Elimelech.

²One day Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, “I would like to go out to the fields. Maybe someone harvesting grain there will be kind enough to let me gather what they leave behind.”

Naomi said, “Okay, my daughter, go ahead.”

³So Ruth went out to the fields. She followed the workers who were cutting the grain and gathered the stalks they left behind.** She didn’t know she was in a field that belonged to Boaz, the relative of Elimelech.

⁴While she was there, Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted his workers: “The LORD be with you!”

And the workers replied, “The LORD bless you too!”

⁵Then Boaz asked the young man in charge of the workers, “Who does that young woman belong to?”

⁶The servant answered, “She’s the young woman who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. ⁷She came early this morning and asked me if she could follow the harvest workers and gather the grain left on the ground. And she has been working ever since, except for a short rest.^{††}”

⁸Boaz went over to Ruth and said, “My daughter, listen to me. Stay here in my field to gather grain for yourself. You don’t need to go to any other field. Stay close behind the other women workers.

⁹Watch them and follow them to the fields where the men are cutting the grain. I have told the men not to bother you. When you are thirsty, you can drink from the water jars my men have filled.”

¹⁰Ruth bowed down with her face to the ground and said to Boaz, “Why are you so kind to me? You know I am an immigrant, so I am surprised you even spoke to me.”

¹¹Boaz answered, “I have heard about all the help you have given to your mother-in-law since your husband died. You left your father and mother and your homeland to come to a land where you did not know anyone. ¹²I pray that the LORD will reward you for all the good things you have done. May the LORD, the God of Israel, pay you in full. You have come to find safety under his care,^{‡‡} and he will protect you.”

¹³Then Ruth said, “You are very kind to say these things, sir. Your words are a great comfort and encouragement to me. I am glad to serve you, but I realize I don’t have the same rights as these other women who serve you.”

¹⁴At mealtime, Boaz told Ruth, “Come and eat with us. Here, have some bread and dip it in the sauce.”

So Ruth sat down with the workers, and Boaz gave her some roasted grain. Ruth ate until she was full and saved the rest. ¹⁵When she got up and went back to work, Boaz told his servants, “Let Ruth gather even around the bundles of grain. Don’t bother her. ¹⁶In fact, pull out some heads of grain from the bundles and drop them on the ground. Let

§2:1 *relative* For the importance of the term “relative” in this story, see the footnote on “protector” at 2:20.

**2:3 The law said a farmer must leave some grain in his field during harvest so that poor people and foreigners could find something to eat. See Lev. 19:9; 23:22.

††2:7 *except ... rest* The meaning of the Hebrew here is uncertain.

‡‡2:12 *You ... care* Literally, “You have come under his wings for safety.”

her pick them up, and don't say anything that would make her feel bad."

Naomi Hears About Boaz

¹⁷Ruth worked in the field until evening. Then she separated the grain from the chaff. There was about 10 kilogrammes[¶] of barley. ¹⁸Ruth carried the grain into town to show her mother-in-law how much she had gathered. She also gave her the food that was left from lunch.

¹⁹Naomi asked her, "Where did you gather all this grain? Where did you work today? God bless the man who was so kind to you!"

Then Ruth told her mother-in-law about the man whose field she had worked in. She said, "The man I worked with today is named Boaz."

²⁰Naomi said, "The LORD bless Boaz! He has been loyal and kind to our family, whether living or dead." Then she explained, "Boaz is a close relative, one of our protectors.^{§§}"

²¹Then Ruth said, "Boaz also told me to come back and continue working. He said I should stay close to his servants until the harvest is finished."

²²Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law Ruth, "My daughter, it is good for you to continue working with his women servants. In another field, someone might harm you." ²³So Ruth continued working closely with the women servants of Boaz. She gathered grain until

the barley harvest and the wheat harvest were finished. And she continued to live with her mother-in-law.

The Threshing Floor

3 Some time later, Ruth's mother-in-law Naomi said to her, "My daughter, I must find you a husband, who will provide you a home and take care of you. ²Remember Boaz, whose field you worked in with his women servants? As you know, he is our relative. As it happens, he will be working at the threshing floor tonight. ³So go and get ready. After a bath, put on some perfume, and dress up in your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor. But don't let Boaz see you until he has finished his dinner. ⁴After he eats, he will lie down to sleep. Watch where he goes to lie down. When he goes to sleep, go and lift the cover off his legs* and lie down beside him. He will tell you what to do next."

⁵Ruth said, "I will do everything you say."

⁶So Ruth went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do. ⁷After eating and drinking, Boaz felt good and went to sleep by the pile of grain. Ruth went very quietly and lifted the cover and lay down beside him.

⁸During the night, something startled Boaz, and he woke up. He turned over and was surprised to find a woman lying beside him. ⁹"Who are you?" he asked.

[¶]2:17 **10 kilogrammes** Literally, "1 ephah".

^{§§}2:20 **protectors** Or "redeemers." A protector was responsible to care for the family of a dead relative. He would take care of this family, but the family and their property would not belong to him. Often a protector would pay for the freedom of relatives who had become slaves. Or he might marry a relative's widow so that she could have children. Also in 3:9,12; 4:1,3,6.

*3:4 **lift the cover off his legs** This was a way of letting Boaz know she was willing to be his wife.

She said, “It’s me, Ruth. I belong to you. You are our family’s protector, so spread your cover over me.”[†]

¹⁰Then Boaz said, “May the LORD bless you, my dear Ruth.[‡] What you are doing shows more devotion to your family than all the good you have already done for them. You could have looked for a young man to marry, rich or poor, but you did not. ¹¹Now, my dear, don’t worry. I will do what you ask, because all the people in town know you are a fine[¶] woman. ¹²And it is true that I am a protector for your family. But there is another protector who is a closer relative to you than I am. ¹³Stay here tonight, and in the morning we will see if he will take care of[§] you. If he is willing, that will be good. But if he refuses to be your protector, I promise before the LORD that I will take care of you myself. So stay here until morning.”

¹⁴So Ruth lay near Boaz the rest of the night. Boaz thought it would be better if no one knew she had come to the threshing floor. So she got up and left while it was still too dark for anyone to recognize her.

Boaz said to her, “We will keep it a secret that you came here to me last night.” ¹⁵As she was leaving, Boaz said, “Spread out that cloak you have and hold it up by the edges.”

So Ruth held it out, and Boaz poured almost 20 kilogrammes of barley into it.

He lifted it up for her to carry on her shoulder. Then he returned^{**} to the city.

¹⁶When Ruth came back to her mother-in-law’s house, Naomi asked her what happened.

Ruth told her everything Boaz had done for her. ¹⁷She said, “Boaz gave me this barley and said, ‘You must not go home without taking this as a gift for your mother-in-law.’”

¹⁸Naomi said, “My daughter, be patient until you see what happens next. Boaz will not rest until he has done all that he should do. He’ll take care of it before the end of the day.”

Boaz Marries Ruth

4 Boaz went to the meeting place at the city gate and sat down. Before long, the other family protector came by. This was the one he had told Ruth about. Boaz called to him, “Come and sit down, my friend.” So the man came over and sat down.

²Boaz also asked ten of the leaders of the city to come and sit down. After they all sat down, ³Boaz said to the other family protector, “Naomi has come back from the hill country of Moab. She wants to sell the land that belonged to our relative Elimelech. ⁴I wanted to tell you about this to give you the choice of buying the land. If you want it, you should say so here in front of all who are present, including the leaders of our people. But if you don’t want it, tell me

[†]**3:9 spread your cover over me** Or “spread your wing over me”. With these words Ruth was asking Boaz to take care of her as one of his wives. See the footnote on “protector” at 2:20.

[‡]**3:10 my dear Ruth** Literally, “My daughter”. Also in verse 11.

[¶]**3:11 fine** This is the same word used to describe Boaz in Ruth 2:1. It is also used in Prov. 31:10.

[§]**3:13 take care of** Or “redeem”. This meant the close relative would marry the dead man’s widow and take care of his family and property.

^{**}**3:15 he returned** Some Hebrew copies and ancient Syriac and Latin versions have “she returned”.

because I am the next one in the family who has the right to buy it.”

The man said, “I will buy the land.”

⁵Then Boaz said, “You should know that when you buy the land from Naomi, I will take her dead son’s widow, Ruth the Moabite, to be my wife.^{††} Then any child she has will inherit the land, and it will stay in the family of her dead husband.”

⁶The other man answered, “Then I cannot buy it. I don’t want to risk losing my own property. You buy the land. I cannot do it.”

⁷During that time in Israel, when people made an agreement about property, one person took off a sandal and gave it to the other person. This made the agreement legal. ⁸So when the man said to Boaz, “You buy the land,” he took off his sandal and gave it to Boaz.^{‡‡}

⁹Then Boaz said to the leaders and all the people, “You are witnesses today that I am buying from Naomi everything that belonged to Elimelech, Kilion and Mahlon. ¹⁰I am also taking Ruth, the Moabite widow of Mahlon, as my wife. Then the dead man’s property will continue to belong to his family. And he will always be remembered by his family and the people in his home town. You are all witnesses of what I am doing today.”

¹¹So the leaders and all the people who were there at the entrance to the city said, “We are witnesses to this. And may the LORD bless this woman who is coming into your home. May she be like Rachel and Leah. They made the family

of Israel strong by having many children. And may you enjoy great success in the family of Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem! ¹²May the LORD bless you with many children through Ruth. May your family become great like the family of Perez,^{¶¶} the son of Judah and Tamar.”

¹³So Boaz married Ruth, and they lived together as husband and wife. The LORD allowed Ruth to become pregnant, and she had a son. ¹⁴The women there said to Naomi, “Praise the LORD who gave you this child.^{§§} May he become famous in Israel. ¹⁵He will give you new life and take care of you in your old age. He is the child you have from your daughter-in-law. She loves you and by herself has been better for you than seven sons.”

¹⁶Naomi took the baby and held him close. She became the one to take care of him. ¹⁷The neighbours gave the boy his name. These women said, “Now Naomi has a son!” They named him Obed.* Obed later became the father of Jesse, who was the father of David.

The Family of Ruth and Boaz

¹⁸This is the family history of Perez: Perez was the father of Hezron.

¹⁹Hezron was the father of Ram.

Ram was the father of Amminadab.

²⁰Amminadab was the father of Nahshon.

Nahshon was the father of Salmon.

²¹Salmon was the father of Boaz.

Boaz was the father of Obed.

²²Obed was the father of Jesse.

^{††}4:5 *I will ... my wife* Or “you must take the dead man’s widow, Ruth the Moabite, to be your wife.”

^{‡‡}4:8 *and gave it to Boaz* This is from the ancient Greek version.

^{¶¶}4:12 *Perez* A famous ancestor in Boaz’s family.

^{§§}4:14 *child* Literally, “protector” or “redeemer”. Although this could refer to Boaz, it probably refers to the baby because he would be the one to later care for Naomi and her family and to carry on the name of Elimelech.

*4:17 *Obed* This name means “servant”.

Jesse was the father of King David.