

RUTH: RESTRUCTURING ONE'S LIFE AFTER A FORCED ADAPTATION

Ruth 1 - 4

STRUCTURE

Key-persons: Naomi, Ruth, Boaz

Key-locations: Moab, Bethlehem

Key-repetitions:

- Problems: hunger (1:1); death (1:3; 5); Naomi telling her daughters-in-law to return to their mother's home (1:11-14); embittered Naomi (1:13; 20); need of food (2:2); the danger of Ruth being abused (2:8; 22); Naomi needed to find a husband for Ruth (3:1); there was a kinsman-redeemer who was a closer relative to Ruth than Boaz (3:12-13).

- Boaz helped Ruth: he made it easy for her to gather grain (2:9, 15-16); he offered water and food (2:8, 14); he encouraged her (2:11-12); he offered her protection (2:9, 16, 22); he valued her as a person (2:11, 3:11).

Key-attitudes:

- The persistence of Ruth in facing obstacles.
- The bitterness of Naomi.

- The virtue of Ruth.

- The kindness of Boaz.

- Happiness for Naomi after facing many problems.

Initial-situation:

The story of Ruth happened during the time when judges ruled in Israel. In those days Israel had no king; everyone did what he thought was right and each generation became worse than the one of his parents.

Initial-problem:

During the time when judges ruled in Israel, there was a famine in Judah. Elimelech, his wife Naomi and their two sons left Judah to go to the country of Moab.

Final-situation:

Ruth, the daughter-in-law of Elimelech and Naomi, had a son named Obed. He would become the grandfather of David.

BIBLE STORY

Naomi and Ruth Return to Bethlehem

In the days when judges ruled, Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit (Jdg 21:25).

During the time when the judges led Israel, there was a famine. Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their two sons left their home in Bethlehem, Judah to live in the country of Moab (1:1-2).

Elimelech died. Naomi's two sons married Moabite women. After they lived in Moab for ten years, Naomi's two sons also died (1:2-5).

Naomi heard that there was going to be a harvest in Judah. Naomi and her two daughters-in-law left Moab and set out on the road that would take them to Judah. After a short time on the road, Naomi told her two daughters-in-law, "Go back to your mother's home. May the Lord show kindness to you, as you have shown to your deceased husbands and to me. May the Lord give each of you a new home and a new husband."

She kissed them. They cried out loud, "No, we will go with you to your people" (1:6-10).

But Naomi said, "Return home, my dear daughters. I am too old to get another husband. Even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons, would you remain unmarried until the babies grew up? No, dear daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you. The Lord is against me!"

Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye; but Ruth clung to Naomi.

Naomi said, "Look, your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go with her."

Ruth replied, "Don't force me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I'll go, and where you stay I'll stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I'll die, and that is where I will be buried. I ask the Lord to punish me if I don't keep this promise: nothing but death will separate you from me." Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, so she stopped arguing with her (1:10-18).

Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem. The town women buzzed, "Can this really be Naomi?"

Naomi told them, "Don't call me Naomi, which means happy. Call me Mara, which means bitter. The Almighty has made my life bitter. I left here full of life, but the Lord has brought me back empty. The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has ruined me" (1:19-21).

Ruth and Boaz

Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest (1:22).

Boaz lived in Bethlehem, and he was a prominent rich man. He was a relative of Naomi's deceased husband Elimelech.

One day Ruth said to Naomi, "Let me go to the fields. Maybe someone will be kind and let me gather the grain he leaves in the field."

Naomi replied, "Go ahead, dear daughter."

Ruth went out and started gleaning in the fields behind the harvesters. It just so happened that the field belonged to Boaz, who was a close relative of Elimelech, her father-in-law (2:1-3).

Boaz arrived and asked the foreman of his harvesters, "Whose young woman is that?"

The foreman replied, "She is the Moabitess, who came back from the country of Moab with Naomi. She went into the field early this morning and has worked steadily."

Boaz spoke to Ruth, "My daughter, listen to me. Don't go to any other field to glean. Stay here in my field to gather grain with my servant girls. Watch where the men are harvesting, and follow along after my servant girls. I warned the men not to harass you. When you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the servants have filled."

Ruth dropped to her knees and bowed her face to the ground. She exclaimed, "Why have you treated me so kindly, and I'm a foreigner?"

Boaz replied, "I've heard how you helped your mother-in-law after the death of your husband. You left your father and mother and your homeland, and came to live with a people where you did not know anyone. The Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek protection will pay you in full."

Ruth answered, "Oh, you are kind to me, sir. You have given me comfort. You have given me hope, though I do not belong here. I am not even one of your servant girls" (2:5-13).

At the lunch break, Boaz invited Ruth, "Come eat some bread; dip it in the wine vinegar."

Ruth sat with the harvesters. Boaz gave her some roasted grain. She ate until she was full and rose and went back to glean. Boaz ordered his men, "Let her gather even around the bundles of grain. Don't embarrass her. Make it easy for her, pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up. Don't rebuke her" (2:14-16).

So Ruth gathered grain; then separated the grain from the chaff. She took almost a full sack of barley back to her mother-in-law. Naomi saw how much she had gathered.

Naomi asked her, "Where did you gather all that grain today? God bless the man who took such good care of you!"

Ruth said, "The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz."

Naomi said, "The Lord bless him! The Lord has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead. That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsmen-redeemers."

Ruth said, "Boaz told me to stay with his workers until they finish harvesting all his grain."

Naomi replied, "That will be good for you; in someone else's field you might be raped."

Ruth continued working in Boaz's fields until both the barley and wheat harvests were finished (2:17-23).

One day Naomi told Ruth, "My dear daughter, it is time for me to find a home for you where you will be well provided for. Boaz is a close relative of ours. Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. Wash and perfume yourself, and put on your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don't let him see you. When he slips off to sleep, watch where he lies down. Go uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do."

Ruth went to the threshing floor and put her mother-in-law's plan into action.

Boaz had a good time, eating and drinking. Then he lay down to sleep beside the pile of grain. Ruth approached, lifted the cover from his feet, and lay down. About midnight, something startled Boaz and he rolled over. He was startled! There was a woman lying at his feet.

Boaz asked, "Who are you?"

She answered, "I am your servant Ruth; spread the corner of your cover over me. You are my close relative; you are a kinsman-redeemer."

Boaz replied, "The Lord bless you, my daughter. What a splendid expression of love. You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of amazing character. I am a close relative to you, but there is a kinsman-redeemer closer than I. In the morning, if he wants to exercise his responsibilities as the closest kinsman-redeemer, he'll have his chance. But if he refuses, I myself will marry you. Then I will buy Elimelech's land for you. Go back to sleep until morning."

Ruth slept near his feet until dawn, but rose while it was too dark to be recognized. Boaz told his servants, "Don't let it be known that a woman came to the threshing floor."

Ruth returned home and told Naomi all that had happened (3:1-18).

Meanwhile Boaz went straight to the town gate and sat there. The kinsman-redeemer who was a closer relative than Boaz came along. Boaz said, "Come over here, my friend. Take a seat."

Boaz gathered ten of the town elders and said, "Sit here, we've got some business to take care of." Boaz said to the kinsman-redeemer, "Naomi has come back from Moab and wants to sell the land that belonged to our relative Elimelech. Buy the land if you want it, and make it official in the presence of these seated here. You are first in line to do this, and I'm next after you. If you buy the land from Naomi and from Ruth the Moabitess, you must marry Ruth, the dead man's wife. You will have the kinsman-redeemer responsibility to have children with her, and the land will stay in her dead husband's family."

The kinsman-redeemer said, "Oh, I can't do that. It might endanger my own estate. I might lose what I can pass on to my own sons. You redeem it yourself."

Boaz announced to the town elders, "Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Kilion and Mahlon. I have also acquired Ruth, Mahlon's widow, as my wife. I'll take her as my wife and keep the name of the deceased alive along with his

inheritance. The name of the deceased will not disappear from among his family or from the town records. Today you are witnesses!" (4:1-12).

Boaz married Ruth, and she became his wife. The Lord enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. The town women told Naomi, "Praise be to the Lord, who gave you this grandson. He will make you young again and take care of you in your old age. Your daughter-in-law, who has given him birth, loves you and is better to you than seven sons."

Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him (4:13-16).

The neighborhood women called him, "Naomi's baby boy." But his name was Obed. Obed was Jesse's father, and Jesse was the father of David (4:17-22).

GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

1. What catches your attention in the story?
2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand?
3. Who are the main characters in the story?
4. What problems did the characters face?
5. How did the characters face their problems?
6. How have you faced similar problems?
7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you?
8. What does the story tell about God?

SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What problems did Naomi and Ruth face that required them to make forced adaptations?
2. How were Ruth's actions and attitudes different than Naomi's?
3. What forced adaptations did Naomi and Ruth face?
4. How did Boaz help Ruth?
5. How can Ruth's story help you when you face crises that force you to make new adaptations?

LIFE-LESSONS

1. Tragedies are a reality of life. There was a famine in the days when judges ruled Israel (1:1). Elimelech died and left Naomi a widow (1:3). Naomi's two sons died and she was left without a husband and without children (1:4-5).
and went back to her parents (1:14). Ruth restructured her life with commitments and determination. She committed herself to stay with Naomi (1:16) and to get food (2:2). She was persistent in harvesting grain (2:6) She was committed to protecting her reputation (3:11).
2. Tragedy brings forced adaptations. Because of famine, Elimelech's family went to live in the country of Moab (1:2). The death of Elimelech and his two sons left Naomi in a foreign country, without protection and without support (1:5). Naomi decided to return to her country, where she had family (1:6). Naomi's decision forced her daughters-in-law to give up their home with her. They were forced to make a decision: go back to their parents' house or go with Naomi to a foreign country (1:8).
3. Reaction to forced adaptation influences the outcome of restructuring one's life. Bitterness was Naomi's reaction (1:13, 20). Resuming life by considering what was best for herself was Orpah's reaction. She said goodbye to her mother-in-law
4. Those faced with forced adaptation are usually vulnerable and unprotected. When Ruth went to the field to gather grain, she was at risk of being raped (2:22). She was unable to protect herself, and she was grateful when Boaz offered her protection (2:9-14).
5. No one is disqualified to be a part of the family of God because of race, sex, or national background. Ruth was a poor foreigner who belonged to a race that was despised by Israel. Boaz was a rich Jew. Ruth was blessed because of her faithfulness. She and Boaz were the great-grandparents of King David and direct ancestors of Jesus (4:17-22).

Today, people of different races, nations and social levels can be part of the family of God, through faith in Jesus.

6. A person cannot be aware of God's purpose for

his life until he is able to look back through the perspective of eternity. The events recorded in Ruth were part of God's preparation for the births of David and Jesus. Ruth was unaware of this larger purpose in her life.