



Enter the Story

Ruth

A narrative about God's redemptive work in a broken world.

THE BIBLE

Ruth 1-4 & Leviticus 25:47-49

Prepare for the Story

ICEBREAKER

- Describe the most embarrassing thing that's happened to you on a date.

Rewind the Story

Can someone highlight what has happened in the story so far ...

- New Commands – Moses & the 10 Commandments
- Promised Land – Spies explore the land
- Conquest – Joshua & Jericho
- Judges – When Israel had no King

***** *Before diving into the next section, read Leviticus 25:47-49. This passage unpacks the Kinsman-Redeemer concept that was part of Jewish custom but something we are unfamiliar with. Take time to explain this concept before beginning.*

Hear the Story

Scene One: Tragedy After Tragedy

In the days when the Judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah took his family, and they went to live for a while in the foreign country of Moab.

The man's name was Elimelek, and his wife's name was Naomi. They had two sons, and they settled down in Moab. Tragically Naomi's husband died, and she was left with just her two sons. The boys grew up and married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other named Ruth. After they lived there 10 years, both sons also died, leaving Naomi with just her two daughters-in-law.

After this, Naomi heard that the LORD had come to the aid of His people and rescued them by providing food. So, she made preparations to return home with her daughters-in-law. Together they left where they had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to Naomi's homeland, back to the land of Judah.

Scene Two: The Journey Home

As they set out on their journey, Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, *"Go back, go home, and live with your mothers. May God treat you as graciously as you have treated your husbands and me. May the LORD give each of you a new home and a new husband!"* Then she kissed them goodbye, but they wept loudly, saying, *"We will go back with you to your people."*

But Naomi said, *"Dear daughters, this is a bitter pill for me to swallow – this is harder for me than it is for you. God has dealt me a devastating blow. Go back, each of you, to your mother's home, and God will show you kindness as you have shown the same kindness to me."*

So Orpah sadly said goodbye to Naomi, but Ruth clung to her. "Look," Naomi said, *"Your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her."* But Ruth replied, *"Don't urge me to leave you. Where you go, I will go, and where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my god. Where you die, I will die, and that's where I will be buried, so help me, God – not even death itself is going to come between us!"* So, Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.

Scene Three: Back in Bethlehem

When they arrived, the whole town was buzzing because of them, and the women of the town explained, "Is this really our Naomi? After all this time?" But she replied, "*Don't call me Naomi; call me Bitter. The Strong One has dealt me a bitter blow. I left here full of life, and God has brought me back with nothing but the clothes on my back. Why would you call me Naomi?* (The name Naomi meant pleasant, sweet, or delightful). *God certainly doesn't. The LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.*"

After their arrival, Ruth said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor." So, she went out, entered a field, and began to follow behind the harvesters. And as it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, a relative of Naomi's through her husband's side of the family.

As she was doing this, Boaz noticed her working in the field, and he asked his foreman, "Who is this young woman? Where did she come from?" The foreman replied, "She is a foreigner who came back from Moab with Naomi. She came into the field and has been here all morning."

Then Boaz went over and said to Ruth, "Listen, my daughter. Stay right here with the women who work for me. Gather grain, and don't worry about going to another field. I've told my staff to treat you kindly. And whenever you are thirsty, help yourself to the water they have drawn from the well." Hearing this, Ruth fell at his feet and thanked him. "What have I done to deserve such kindness?" she asked. "I am only a foreigner."

"Yes, I know," Boaz replied, "But I've been told about everything you've done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband. I have heard how you left your family and your own land and moved here to live with complete strangers. May the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have taken refuge, reward you fully for what you have done."

Ruth worked the rest of the day, and when she returned home, she told Naomi all about Boaz and what he had done for her.

Scene Four: Redemption

Upon hearing what had happened, Naomi was thrilled. “The LORD bless that man!” she said. “God has not stopped showing his kindness to us; he has not abandoned us yet. Boaz is our relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers. It will be good for you to keep going to his field and working; you will be safe there.” So Ruth did as Naomi said and returned to Boaz’s field for the remainder of the harvest.

One day Naomi said to Ruth, *“I must find a home for you where you will be taken care of and provided for. This man, Boaz, is a relative of ours; maybe it’s time to make our move.*

Tonight, he will be working the threshing floor. Take a bath. Put on some perfume and put on your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don’t let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, go and uncover his feet and lie down, letting him know you are available for marriage. Then wait and see what he says. He will tell you what to do.”

So, Ruth went to the threshing floor and did everything Naomi had told her to do. In the middle of the night, something startled Boaz; he turned, and there was a woman lying at his feet! “Whose there?” he asked. “It is your servant, Ruth,” she said. “Take me under your protecting wing, for you are my kinsman-redeemer.”

“The LORD bless you!” Boaz exclaimed. “You are showing even more family loyalty now than you did before, for you have not gone after a younger man, whether rich or poor. Now don’t worry about a thing. I will do what is necessary, for everyone knows you are a virtuous woman. It is true that I am one of your kinsman-redeemers; there is another man who is more closely related to you than I am. Stay here tonight, and in the morning, I will talk to him. If he is willing to redeem you, very well. Let him marry you. But if he is not willing, then as surely as the LORD lives, I will redeem you myself!”

Scene Five: A New Family

In the morning, Boaz gathered the elders of the town and met with the other kinsman-redeemer at the gates of the city. He said to the other man, *“Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our relative. I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest you buy it in the presence of those seated here.*

If you want to redeem it, do so. But if you won't, then I am next in line, and I will. Then Boaz said, "Of course, your purchase of the land from Naomi also requires that you marry Ruth, the Moabite widow. That way, she can have children who will carry on her husband's name and keep the land in the family."

At this, the other man said, *"I can't redeem it because this might endanger my own estate. You redeem the land; I cannot do it."*

Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, *"Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi her property. I also have responsibility for Ruth; I would like to take her to be my wife."*

So, Boaz and Ruth were married. The LORD blessed them, and they became pregnant. After Ruth gave birth, Naomi took the child in her arms; she cuddled him, cared for him, and waited on him hand and foot. The women living in Bethlehem jokingly said, *"Naomi has had a son!"* Boaz and Ruth named the child Obed. He was the father of Jesse, who was the father of David.

Retell the Story

- What happened to the family at the beginning of the story?
- After Naomi's family died, she got some news. What was it?
- Who went with Naomi back to her homeland?
- What happened to Ruth in Bethlehem?
- What does Ruth ask of Boaz?
- What does Boaz do?
- What is the end result of Ruth's story?

Discuss the Story

- What is your first reaction to this story? How did this story make you feel?
- What stood out to you from this story? What did you notice for the first time?

- What from this story made you wonder?
- What do you think about how Naomi reacts to losing her family?
- What about how her daughters-in-law respond to her?
- What was significant about Ruth's response to Naomi's plea for her to return to her own mother?
- Compare and contrast the character of Ruth & Boaz from the story.
- In our previous story (Judges), it seems that God is against the "non-Israelites" in this story, Ruth is a "non-Israelite." Why does God use/redeem her?
- What does God do in the life of Naomi, and how is this similar to what we might experience?
- Did you hear anything that reminded you of *other* stories?
- From this story, what did you notice about humans?
- From this story, what do you notice about God's character or His qualities?

1) GOD IS IN CONTROL

In our spiritual journey, we all have moments when we feel “far away” or disconnected from God. Many times, it’s in these moments that God proves to us that He is still God and He is still in charge. He did this for Naomi; give an example from your spiritual journey when He has done this for you.

2) THE NATURE OF SACRIFICE

In this narrative, both Ruth and Boaz make sacrifices in order to do what is right. What is it about the nature of making a sacrifice that connects us with who God is? How does this help you understand what God may be calling you to and what a real sacrifice looks like?

3) GOD'S STORY

God extends His arms to Ruth in this story. Not only does she become part of the Israelite family, but she also becomes the great-grandmother to the most influential King Israel will ever have. What do you think God is up to in this shocking move of taking a “foreigner” and bringing her into the “royal” family? What does this tell you about what God is up to here and now?

Pray

God,

Nothing can defeat your gracious and redemptive purposes. In spite of our rebellion, You continue to unfold Your story in creative and unexpected ways. We don’t know what’s around the next corner of our lives, but You do, and You always intend my ultimate good. By Your grace, release us from all bitterness and resentment and help us embrace our hope in You.