

# Ruth

<sup>1</sup> There was a famine during the time when the judges ruled\* Israel, so a man left Bethlehem in Judah and went to live in exile in the country of Moab, along with his wife and two sons. <sup>2</sup> His name was Elimelech, and his wife's name Naomi. His sons were called Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites† from Bethlehem in Judah. They went to the country of Moab and lived there.

<sup>3</sup> However, Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. <sup>4</sup> The sons married Moabite women. One was called Orpah, the other was called Ruth. After about ten years, <sup>5</sup> both Mahlon and Chilion died. Naomi was left alone, without her two sons or her husband. <sup>6</sup> So she and her daughters-in-law prepared to leave the country of Moab and return home because she had heard that the Lord had blessed his people there with food. <sup>7</sup> She left the place where she had been living and with her two daughters-in-law set out on the road back to the land of Judah.

<sup>8</sup> However, as they left, Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Each of you, go back to your mother's homes, and may the Lord be as kind to

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\* **1:1** Literally "when judges judged," but this was in an executive role, rather than simply judicial. † **1:2** Ephrathah is thought to be an older name for this particular Bethlehem, or a way of specifically identifying it. The two names occur together in Micah 5:2.

you as you have been to me, and to those who have died. <sup>9</sup> May the Lord give you a good home with another husband.” She kissed them, and they all started to cry loudly.

<sup>10</sup> “No! We want to go back with you to your people,” they replied.

<sup>11</sup> “Why do you want to go back with me?” Naomi asked. “I’m not able to have any more sons for you to marry. <sup>12</sup> Go back home, my daughters, because I’m too old to marry again. Even if I were to sleep with a new husband tonight and had sons, <sup>13</sup> would you wait for them to grow up? Would you decide you weren’t going to marry anyone else? No. The whole situation is more bitter for me than it is for you, for the Lord has turned against me!”<sup>‡</sup>

<sup>14</sup> They started crying loudly again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye. But Ruth held on tightly to Naomi.

<sup>15</sup> “Look, your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back home with her,” said Naomi.

<sup>16</sup> But Ruth replied, “Please don’t keep on telling me to leave you and go back. Where you go, I will go. Where you live, I will live. Your people will be my people. Your God will be my God. <sup>17</sup> Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord punish me harshly if I let anything but death separate us!”

<sup>18</sup> When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped telling Ruth to go

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<sup>‡</sup> **1:13** “The Lord has turned against me”: literally, “the hand of the Lord has gone against me.”

home. <sup>19</sup> So the two of them walked on until they reached Bethlehem. When they arrived there, the whole town got excited. “Is this Naomi?”<sup>§</sup> the women asked.

<sup>20</sup> She said to them, “Don't call me Naomi! Call me Mara,\* for the Almighty has treated me very bitterly. <sup>21</sup> I left here full, but the Lord has brought me home empty. Why call me Naomi when the Lord has condemned me, when the Almighty has brought disaster on me?”

<sup>22</sup> This is the way that Naomi returned from Moab with Ruth, the Moabite, her daughter-in-law. They arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

## 2

<sup>1</sup> Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side whose name was Boaz. He was a rich and influential man from the family of Elimelech.

<sup>2</sup> Soon after Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, “Please let me go to the fields and pick up grain that's been left behind—if I can find someone will give me permission.”

“Yes, go ahead, my daughter,” Naomi replied.

<sup>3</sup> So she went and picked up grain the reapers had left behind. She happened to be working in a field that belonged to Boaz, a relative of Elimelech.

<sup>4</sup> Later on Boaz arrived from Bethlehem, and said to the reapers, “May the Lord be with you!”

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§ 1:19 Not that they didn't recognize her, but that she was returning as a widow in poor circumstances. \* 1:20 Naomi means “happy,” while Mara means “bitter.”

They replied, "The Lord bless you!" <sup>5</sup> Then Boaz asked his servant who was in charge of the harvesters, "Who is this young woman related to?"\* <sup>6</sup> "The young woman is a Moabite who came back with Naomi from Moab," the servant replied. <sup>7</sup> "She asked me, 'Please may I have permission to pick up grain behind the reapers.'† So she came, and she's been working here from morning until now, except for a brief rest in the shelter."

<sup>8</sup> Boaz went and spoke to Ruth. "Listen to me, my daughter," he told her. "Don't leave to go and pick up grain in someone else's field. Stay close to my women. <sup>9</sup> Pay attention to what part of the field the men are reaping and follow the women.‡ I've told the men not to bother you. When you get thirsty, go and have a drink from the water jars the servants have filled."

<sup>10</sup> She bowed down with her face to the ground. "Why are you being so kind to me or even notice me, seeing I'm a foreigner?" she asked him.

<sup>11</sup> "I've heard about all you've done for your mother-in-law since your husband died," Boaz replied. "And also how you left your father and mother, and the land of your birth, to come and live among people you didn't know. <sup>12</sup> May the

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\* **2:5** Literally, "Whose is that young woman?" † **2:7** The Hebrew adds "among the sheaves," but this is probably transposed from verse 15. She was given this unusual permission by Boaz only later. ‡ **2:9** It is thought that the men did the work of cutting the stalks of grain, while the women followed behind tying them into sheaves.

Lord fully reward you for all you've done—the Lord, the God of Israel, to whom you've come for protection. §

<sup>13</sup> Thank you for being so good to me, sir,” she replied. “You have reassured me by speaking to me kindly. I'm not even one of your servants.”

<sup>14</sup> When it was time to eat, Boaz called her over. “Come here,” he said. “Take some bread and dip it in wine vinegar.”

So she sat down with the workers and Boaz passed her some roasted grain to eat. She ate until she'd had enough with some left over.

<sup>15</sup> After Ruth went back to work Boaz told his men, “Let her pick up grain even among the sheaves. Don't say anything to embarrass her.

<sup>16</sup> In fact, pull out some stalks from the bundles you're cutting and leave them for her to pick up. Don't tell her off.”

<sup>17</sup> Ruth worked in the field until the evening. When she beat out the grain that she had picked up it was a large amount.\* <sup>18</sup> She picked it up and took it back to town to show her mother-in-law how much she had collected. Ruth also gave her what she had left over from her meal.

<sup>19</sup> Naomi asked her, “Where did you pick up grain today? Exactly where did you work? Bless whoever cared enough about you to pay you some attention!” So she told her mother-in-law about who she had worked with. “The man I worked with today is called Boaz.”

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§ 2:12 Literally, “under whose wings you have sought refuge.”

\* 2:17 “Large amount,”: literally, “an ephah,” a unit of measurement of uncertain quantity, estimated at between 22 and 45 liters.

20 “The Lord bless him!” Naomi exclaimed to her daughter-in-law. “He goes on showing his kindness to the living and the dead. That man is a close relative to us—a ‘family redeemer.’” †

21 Ruth added, “He also told me, ‘Stay close to my workers until they have finished harvesting my entire crop.’”

22 “That’s good, my daughter,” Naomi told Ruth. “Stay with his women workers. Don’t go to other fields where you might be molested.” 23 So Ruth stayed with Boaz’ women workers picking up grain until the end of the barley harvest, and then on to the end of the wheat harvest. She lived with her mother-in-law the whole time.

### 3

1 A little later Naomi said to Ruth, “My daughter, don’t you think I should find you a husband and a good home?”\* 2 Don’t ignore the fact that Boaz, whose women you worked with, is closely related to us. Now tonight he will be busy winnowing grain on the threshing floor. † 3 Have a bath, put on some perfume, wear your best ‡

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† 2:20 “Family redeemer”: a term for someone who had the responsibility to protect the interests of the family, particularly in the case of someone who died. \* 3:1 “A husband and a good home”: the word used here refers to the rest and security provided from being married.

† 3:2 Grain was processed first by threshing, a procedure by which the grain was separated from the stalks. Then it was winnowed by throwing it up in the air so that the wind would carry away the outer shell of the grain called chaff, and the grain would fall back down to be collected. ‡ 3:3 The Hebrew does not specifically say “best” but this would surely be implied.

clothes, and go down to the threshing floor—but don't let him recognize you. Once he's finished eating and drinking, <sup>4</sup> watch where he goes to lie down. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. Then he will tell you what to do.”§

<sup>5</sup> “I'll do everything you told me,” said Ruth.

<sup>6</sup> She went down to the threshing floor and did what her mother-in-law had told her to do.

<sup>7</sup> After Boaz had finished eating and drinking, and was feeling contented, he went and lay down beside the grain pile. Ruth quietly approached him, uncovered his feet, and lay down.

<sup>8</sup> Around midnight Boaz suddenly woke up. Bending forward he was surprised to see a woman lying at his feet.

<sup>9</sup> “Who are you?” he asked.

“I'm Ruth, your servant,” she replied. “Please spread the corner of your cloak over me, for you are my family redeemer.”\*

<sup>10</sup> “May the Lord bless you, my daughter,” he said. “You are showing even more loyalty and love to the family than before. You haven't gone looking for a younger man, of whatever social status.† <sup>11</sup> So don't worry, my daughter. I will do everything you ask—everyone in town knows you are a woman of good character. <sup>12</sup> However,

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§ **3:4** Ruth's action was a recognized symbol of asking for protection and initiating the obligation of “family redeemer” (see 2:20). This is why Boaz “will tell you what to do”—in terms of the requirements necessary to fulfill this obligation. \* **3:9** Again this symbolic act was a request to fulfill the obligation of family redeemer, which included marriage. † **3:10** “Social status”: literally, “rich or poor.”

even though I'm one of your family redeemers, there's one who is more closely related than I am. <sup>13</sup> Stay here tonight, and in the morning if he wants to redeem you, then fine, let him do it. But if he doesn't, then I promise you in the name of the living Lord, I will redeem you. Lie down here until morning."

<sup>14</sup> So Ruth lay at his feet until morning. Then she got up before it was light enough to recognize anyone because Boaz had told her, "No one must know that a woman came here to the threshing floor."<sup>‡</sup>

<sup>15</sup> He also told her, "Bring me the cloak you're wearing and hold it out." So she held it out and he poured out six measures<sup>§</sup> of barley into it. He helped her put it on her back and she\* went back to town.

<sup>16</sup> Ruth went to her mother-in-law, who asked her, "How did it go for you, my daughter?"<sup>†</sup> So Ruth told her everything that Boaz had done for her.

<sup>17</sup> "And he also gave me these six measures of barley," she added. "He told me, 'You mustn't go home to your mother-in-law empty-handed.' "

<sup>18</sup> Naomi said to Ruth, "Wait patiently, my daughter, until you find out how it all works out. Boaz won't rest until he has it settled today."

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<sup>‡</sup> **3:14** Clearly Boaz was concerned to protect Ruth's reputation.

<sup>§</sup> **3:15** Estimated at 24 liters or 50 pounds. \* **3:15** The majority of Hebrew manuscripts read "he." The minority manuscripts are followed here. <sup>†</sup> **3:16** "How did it go for you?" literally, "who you, my daughter?"

## 4

<sup>1</sup> Boaz went to the town gate,\* and sat down there. The family redeemer that Boaz had mentioned happened to pass by, so Boaz said to him, “Come over here, friend, and sit down.” The man came over and sat down. <sup>2</sup> Then Boaz selected ten of the town elders and asked them to sit there with them.

<sup>3</sup> Boaz said to the family redeemer, “Naomi who has returned from the country of Moab is selling the piece of land that belonged to Elimelech, our relative. <sup>4</sup> I decided I should tell you in case you want to buy it here in the presence of these elders of the people. If you want to redeem it, then go ahead. But if you don't, then tell me so I'll know, because you are first in line to redeem it, and I'm next.”

“I want to redeem it,”<sup>†</sup> said the family redeemer.

<sup>5</sup> “When you buy the land from Naomi you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, Mahlon's widow, so you can marry her and have children with her to ensure the man's line continues,”<sup>‡</sup> Boaz explained.

<sup>6</sup> “Well, I can't do it then,” the family redeemer replied. “If I were to redeem it, that could

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\* **4:1** Civil affairs including legal matters were conducted in the area around the town gate. † **4:4** The answer is not a strongly positive one. ‡ **4:5** The marriage provision is found in Deuteronomy 25:5-10 and following, while the land transfer laws are in Leviticus 25:23-28.

jeopardize what I already own. § You redeem it for yourself, because I can't."

<sup>7</sup> (Now during those times it was the custom in Israel to confirm the action of family redeemer, property transfer, or any similar legal matter by removing a sandal and handing it over. This was the way of validating a transaction in Israel.)

<sup>8</sup> So the family redeemer took off his sandal and told Boaz, "You buy it."

<sup>9</sup> Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people present, "You are witnesses that today I have bought from Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech, Mahlon, and Chilion. <sup>10</sup> I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, Mahlon's widow, as my wife. By having children who may inherit his property his name will be kept alive in his family and in his home town. You are witnesses of this today."

<sup>11</sup> The elders and all the people present at the town gate said, "Yes, we are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming to your house like Rachel and Leah who between them gave birth to the people of Israel. May you become prosperous in Ephrathah, and famous in Bethlehem. <sup>12</sup> May your descendants the Lord gives you through this young woman become like the descendants of Perez, the son Tamar bore to Judah."

<sup>13</sup> Boaz took Ruth home, and she became his wife. He slept with her, and the Lord arranged

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§ 4:6 The man was concerned that any property he already had would also be included in the legacy to any son Ruth would have, and it would be credited to her dead husband's line.

for her to become pregnant, and she gave birth to a son.

<sup>14</sup> The women of the town\* came to Naomi and said, “Praise the Lord, for today he didn’t leave you without a family redeemer by giving you this grandson†—may he become famous throughout Israel. <sup>15</sup> He will give you a new lease of life and provide for you in your old age, for your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better than seven sons to you, has given birth to him.”

<sup>16</sup> Naomi picked up the child and hugged him. She looked after him like her own son.‡

<sup>17</sup> The neighbor women named him Obed,§ saying “Naomi now has a son!” He was the father of Jesse who was the father of David.

<sup>18</sup> This is the family line of Perez: Perez was the father of Hezron. <sup>19</sup> Hezron was the father of Ram. Ram was the father of Amminadab. <sup>20</sup> Amminadab was the father of Nahshon. Nahshon was the father of Salmon. <sup>21</sup> Salmon was the father of Boaz. Boaz was the father of Obed. <sup>22</sup> Obed was the father of Jesse. Jesse was the father of David.

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\* **4:14** See 1:19. † **4:14** “By giving you this grandson”: implied.

‡ **4:16** Literally, “she became his nurse.” § **4:17** “Obed,” meaning “servant” as in “servant of God.”

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