

THE BOOK OF RUTH – SHORT VERSION

The Book of Ruth is one of the most loved books of the Bible. Its main characters are ordinary people like ourselves. The events that make up the story are ones that we can easily identify with. As we read the book, we feel the pain of Naomi and we are inspired and touched by the loyalty of Ruth and the goodness of Boaz.

Ruth is one of only three books in the Bible that bears the name of a woman. The other two are Esther and Judith. Ruth is one of four women mentioned in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus (Matt 1:5).

God's universal love. In the larger picture of the history of salvation, the purpose of the Book of Ruth serves a twofold function:

- To show God's love for *all* people. The main character in the book is a non-Israelite who comes to know and love the God of Israel. She is shown as acceptable to God. By including her in God's genealogy, Matthew shows that Ruth participated in God's plan to save all people—Jew and Gentile alike. God's love is inclusive and not exclusive.
- To set up the ancestral lineage of King David, Israel's greatest ruler. Ruth becomes the great-grandmother of David.

From the above, we can say that the "theme that runs throughout the whole book and holds it together is that of *fidelity, loyalty born of covenant bonding*. Both human fidelity and divine fidelity are combined in such a way that potential tragedy is turned into ultimate happiness" (Eugene Hensell, O.S.B).

God in the book. Although God never speaks or directly acts in the book, his presence is very tangible. That presence is frequently referred to in the blessings spoken by the main characters.

Naomi blesses her two daughters-in-law (1:8); Boaz blesses Ruth for her loyalty to Naomi (2:12) and her good character (3:10); Naomi blesses Boaz for his kindness to Ruth (2:20); the blessing of fertility is bestowed upon Ruth by

the men at the city gate (4:11-12); and finally, the lady friends of Naomi bless her and her grandson (4:15).

The Story. Because of famine, Naomi's family migrates to Moab where her sons marry Moabite women. Later, Naomi's husband and sons die, so she prepares to return home. One daughter-in-law, Ruth, insists on going back to Canaan with her. There she meets and marries Boaz, a kinsman. They bear a child, Obed, who will become the grandfather of King David.

This short book can be subdivided as follows:

CHAPTER 1:1-18: Naomi and her family in Moab

CHAPTER 2: Ruth meets Boaz

CHAPTER 3: Naomi the matchmaker

CHAPTER 4: Ruth marries Boaz