

The Story of God's Favor toward Naomi and Ruth

Based on the Book of Ruth

Once upon a time, in the days of the Judges, a famine was in the land. A man named Elimelech from Bethlehem left with Naomi his wife and their two sons to live in Moab. Shortly thereafter Elimelech died. His sons married Moabite women—Orpah and Ruth. After ten years, tragedy struck again. Naomi's sons died. Naomi was left without both her husband and her two sons.

One day she pulled herself together and decided to leave Moab to return home to Bethlehem. She had heard God had given favor to her homeland by ending the famine. Her daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, were with her. As they walked she turned to them and urged them to return to their mothers. It wasn't that she did not love them. She blessed them, "May God treat you as graciously as you treated your husbands and me." But she did not see any hope for them to stay with her. She kissed them and they all cried, and the girls protested. But she was firm.

"This is a bitter pill for me to swallow! God's hand has gone out against me." So Orpah turned back. But Ruth said, "*Don't force me to leave you and go home. Where you go, I go, and where you live, I'll live. Your people are my people, your God is my god, where you die, I'll die, and that's where I will be buried, so help me God. See, death won't even separate us.*"

So Naomi gave in. And they traveled and the two of them arrived in Bethlehem. The townspeople were thrilled to see her. But she was not thrilled. She was broken.

"Don't call me Naomi! I've changed my name. Call me Bitter (Mara). I went away full. With that, the women settled in. But they needed provisions. Ruth said, "I'm going out to the fields to pick up leftover grain, if someone gives me favor. That was the way poor people lived—the harvesters left grain along the edges of the fields. So Ruth went out looking for a place to glean.

Naomi had a relative on her husband's side, a prominent and rich man. His name was Boaz. *It just so happened* that Ruth ended up in Boaz's field. That very day Boaz arrived. He saw Ruth and inquired about her. "Oh, that's the young lady who came here with Naomi. She's here every day, without even taking a break."

Boaz was impressed. "Don't go to any other fields. Stay here! Don't worry about a thing. I will make sure you are safe. Feel free to get a drink from the water buckets," he said.

Ruth was so grateful she exclaimed, "How does this happen that you should treat me—a foreigner—so kindly?" Thank you, thank you, and she bowed low.

"I've heard all about you—your devotion to your mother-in-law, how you both lost your husbands and yet you came here to care for her. *God bless you for what you have done!*"

Little did he know that he himself would be that very blessing which he had pronounced for her. It happened this way.

At suppertime, Boaz invited her to eat with his harvesters. He then instructed his workers to pull out the best stalks and bundle them for her. When Naomi (who still called herself Mara) saw it, she couldn't believe it. "God bless that man," she cried! Both sides were blessing the other!

God is the most amazing matchmaker, but no one knows it yet!

For a long time Naomi lived bitter and looking back. But one day she began to change, turn to the future—not for herself, but for Ruth. “I need to find you a home where you will be provided for.” So she set a plan. She told Ruth, “Wash. Put on my best perfume and your best dress. Go down to the threshing floor where the harvesters’ are celebrating tonight. You are going to propose to Boaz on the threshing floor!” It was risky. No women allowed!

That night after the party Boaz went into the barn and fell asleep. Suddenly he felt someone’s presence—it was Ruth! He said, “I adore you even more. You have not chased after the younger men but after me! I will try to arrange to marry you because you have even more noble character than I thought.”

In those days, customs were closely followed, and there was another man ahead of Boaz who had first rights. And so the next day Boaz found the man, and negotiated a deal. He did not rest until it was done!

When Boaz announced to the elders that he was the redeemer to marry Ruth, a cheer went up! Then the elders and all who were at the city gate blessed them with a toast: *“May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah—Jacob’s wives who had twelve sons! May you and Ruth become famous in Bethlehem!”*

And so it was. The Lord enabled Ruth to conceive and she gave birth to a son. The women said to Naomi: “Praise be to the Lord who has not left you without any hope. May this child become famous because he will renew your life and sustain you in your old age! For your daughter-in-law who loves you is better to you than seven sons.”

Naomi took the child and she smiled as she rocked him. The baby, Obed, became the father of Jesse, who was the father of King David. Naomi, who came home empty, lived the rest of her days, FULL.