

RUTH

A reading version based on the New Jerusalem Bible.

Cast: Narrator, Professor, Naomi, Ruth, Woman, Boaz, Orpah, Supervisor, Man, Elder, Matthew
(the last five can be read by one person)

Scene 1

- Narrator There was a famine in Judah, and an Ephrathite family from Bethlehem went to live across the Jordan in the Plains of Moab. There the man, Elimelech, died, leaving his widow Naomi and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion.
- Professor The names Mahlon and Chilion mean Sickness and Pining Away. But the name Elimelech means My-God-Is-King; the question is, will that be proved true?
- Narrator Mahlon and Chilion married Moabite women called Orpah and Ruth, but after ten years the two young men also died, so that Naomi was bereft of her two sons as well as her husband. Then Naomi heard that God had visited Judah and given them food. So they set off for Judah.
- Naomi Go back, you two, to your mothers' houses. May Yahweh show you faithful love as you did to your husbands and to me. Yahweh grant you to find happiness with a husband!
- Ruth No! No!
- Orpah We will go back with you to your people!
- Naomi Go home, daughters. Why come with me? Have I any more sons in my womb to make husbands for you? Go home, daughters, go, for I am too old to marry again. Even if I said "I still have a hope, I shall take a husband this very night and bear more sons," would you be prepared to wait for them until they were grown up? Would you refuse to marry for their sake? No, daughters, I am bitterly sorry for your sakes that the hand of Yahweh should have been raised against me.
- Narrator They wept, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law and went back to her people. But Ruth stayed with her.
- Naomi Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her god. You go home too. Follow your sister-in-law.
- Ruth Do not press me to leave you and to stop going with you. Wherever you go, I want to go; wherever you live, I want to live. Your people will be my people and your God will be my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May Yahweh bring unnameable ills on me and worse ills too, if anything but death should part me from you.
- Narrator Seeing her determination, Naomi said no more. The two of them went on till they came to Bethlehem. Their arrival set the whole town astir.
- Woman Can this be Naomi?

Naomi Do not call me Naomi, call me Marah, for Shaddai has made my lot bitter. I departed full and Yahweh has brought me home empty. Why, then, call me Naomi, since Yahweh has pronounced against me, Shaddai has made me wretched?

Professor Naomi means "My Sweetness." Marah means "Bitter."

Scene 2

Ruth It's the barley harvest. Let me go into the fields and glean ears of corn in the footsteps of some man who will look on me with favor.

Naomi Go, daughter.

Narrator So she set out to glean in the fields behind the reapers. Chance led her to a plot of land belonging to one Boaz, who was a well-to-do relative of Naomi's on her husband's side. Boaz, as it happened had just come from Bethlehem.

Boaz Yahweh be with you!

Supervisor Yahweh bless you!

Boaz To whom does that young woman belong?

Supervisor She is the Moabite who came back with Naomi from Moab. She asked if she could glean and pick up what falls from the sheaves behind the reapers. She has stayed with hardly a rest from morning until now.

Boaz (to Ruth) Listen, madam. You must not go gleaning in any other field. You must not go away from here. Stay close to the women who work for me. Keep your eye on whatever part of the field they are reaping and follow behind. I have ordered the young men not to bother you. And if you are thirsty, go to the pitchers and drink what the young men have drawn.

Ruth How have I found favor with you, that you should notice me, when I am only a foreigner?

Boaz I have been told all about the way you have behaved to your mother-in-law since your husband died, and how you left your own father and mother and the land where you were born to come to a people you did not know before. May Yahweh repay you for what you have done, and may you be richly rewarded by Yahweh, the God of Israel, under whose skirts you have come for refuge!

Ruth Sir, I hope you will always look on me with favor! You have comforted and encouraged me, even though I am not one of your workers.

Narrator In due course it was meal time.

Boaz Come and eat some of this bread and dip your piece in the sour wine.

Narrator Ruth sat beside the reapers and Boaz made a heap of roasted grain for her. She ate what she wanted and had some left over. When she had got up to glean, Boaz

gave orders to his workers:

Boaz Let her glean among the sheaves themselves. Do not bother her. And be sure you pull a few ears of corn out of the bundles and drop them. Leave them for her to glean; do not rebuke her.

Narrator So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned and it came to about a bushel of barley. Taking it with her, she went back to the town. Her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. Ruth also gave her what she had kept after eating all she wanted.

Noami Where were you gleaning? Blessed be the man who took notice of you!

Ruth His name is Boaz.

Naomi May he be blessed by Yahweh who does not withhold his faithful love from living or dead! This man is a relative of ours, one of our guardians.

Professor In Israel your close relatives were under moral obligation to come to your aid when you were in need (for instance, if you were reduced to poverty) rather than leave you resourceless and vulnerable. This is what is meant by being a "guardian" or "redeemer" and by "redeeming". They were also under obligation to the dead to see that their land was preserved and their name maintained.

Ruth He also said, "Stay with my workers until they have finished my whole harvest."

Naomi It is better for you, my daughter, to go with his workers than to go to some other field where you might be ill-treated.

Narrator So she stayed with Boaz's workers, and gleaned until the barley and wheat harvests were finished.

Scene 3

Naomi My daughter, I need to seek some security for you. And Boaz, the relative of ours, whose workers you have been with—he will be winnowing the barley on the threshing floor tonight. So have a bath and perfume yourself and put on your best clothes and go down to the threshing-floor. Don't let him recognize you while he is still eating and drinking. But when he lies down, take note where he lies, then go and turn back the covering at his feet and lie down yourself. He will tell you what to do.

Narrator She did everything her mother-in-law had said. In the middle of the night, Boaz woke up with a shock and looked about him, and there lying at his feet was a woman.

Boaz Who are you?

Ruth I am your servant Ruth. Spread your skirts over your servant for you are a guardian.

Boaz Yahweh bless you, madam, for this second act of faithful love of yours is greater than the first, since you have not run after young men, poor or rich.

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Professor Boaz refers to the way in which Ruth is going about showing faithfulness to Elimelech in seeking to provide him with a legal descendant via Boaz.

Boaz Don't be afraid, madam, I shall do everything you ask, since the people at the gate of my town all know that you are a woman of great worth. But though it is true that I am a guardian, you have a guardian closer than myself. Stay here for tonight and in the morning, if he wishes to act as guardian to you, very well, let him do so. But if he does not wish to do so, then as Yahweh lives, I will act as guardian to you. But it must not be known that this woman came to the threshing-floor.

Narrator So she lay at his feet till morning, but got up before the hour when one person can recognize another. And Boaz filled her cloak with six measures of barley, and put it on her back, and off she went to the town and told Naomi everything the man had done for her.

Naomi Do nothing, daughter, until you see how things have gone. I am sure he will not rest until he has settled the matter this very day.

Scene 4

Narrator Boaz, meanwhile, had gone up to the gate and sat down, and the guardian of whom he had spoken then came by. Boaz also picked out ten of the town's elders.

Boaz Here, my friend, come and sit down. Naomi, who has come back from the Plains of Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our brother Elimelech. I thought I should tell you about this and say, "Acquire it in the presence of the men who are sitting here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you want to redeem it, do; if you do not, tell me, so that I can know, for I am the only person to redeem it apart from you, and I come after you.

The man I am willing to redeem it.

Boaz The day you acquire the field from Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the wife of the man who has died, to perpetuate the dead man's name in his inheritance.

The man I cannot redeem it without jeopardizing my own inheritance. Since I cannot, redeem it. yourself.

Narrator It was the custom in Israel to confirm a transaction in matters of redemption or inheritance by one of the parties taking off his sandal and giving it to the other. So the man took off his sandal.

Professor To put a sandal (or a foot) on a piece of land marks a claim to it. So taking off a sandal has the opposite implication. In Deuteronomy :25, someone who will not act as guardian/redeemer has his sandal pulled off as a gesture of shaming.

Boaz Today you elders and bystanders are witnesses that from Naomi I acquire everything that used to belong to Elimelech and everything that used to belong to Mahlon and Chilion, and that I am also acquiring Ruth the Moabite, Mahlon's widow, to be my wife, to perpetuate the dead man's name in his inheritance, so

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- that the dead man's name will not be lost among his brothers and at the gate of his town.
- Elder May Yahweh make the woman about to enter your family like Rachel and Leah who together built up the house of Israel. Grow mighty in Ephratah, be renowned in Bethlehem! And through the children Yahweh will give you by this young woman, may your family be like the family of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.
- Narrator So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. And when they came together, Yahweh made her conceive and she bore a son.
- Woman (to Naomi) Blessed be Yahweh who has not left you today without a guardian. May his name be praised in Israel! The child will be a comfort to you and the prop of your old age, for he has been born to the daughter-in-law who loves you and is more to you than seven sons.
- Narrator And Naomi, taking the child, held him to her breast; and she it was who looked after him.
- Woman A son has been born to Naomi! His name is to be Obed.
- Professor Obed means "servant [of Yahweh]."
- Narrator So Perez fathered Hezron, Hezron Ram, Ram Amminadab, Arnminadab Nahshon, Nahshon Salmon, Salmon Boaz; and Boaz fathered Obed, and Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered —David.
- Matthew So in due course Jesus was born as the descendant of Boaz and Ruth.