

RUTH

God welcomes anyone who trusts him

The heroes we have met in our recent Bible stories—Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, and Samson—have been descendants of Abraham. God made the nation of Israel from all the children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren of Abraham. This nation was very special to God and he welcomed them into a very special relationship with himself that other nations did not know... at least not yet.

In today's story we meet a special woman who had a special relationship with God even though she was not a grand-daughter of Abraham and even though she was not born in the nation of Israel. Her name is Ruth.

But the story doesn't start with Ruth. It starts with a man and wife named Elimelech and Naomi. They lived in the town of Bethlehem and they had two sons while they lived there. This was their hometown and the place where their family and friends lived and they were quite happy to live there. Until something bad happened. A terrible famine hit the land where they lived. It was awful for Elimelech and Naomi to tell their sons that they had no food to feed them. Before long, it got so bad they decided to move somewhere where the famine was not so bad and so they moved to a nation by the name of Moab.

The people of Moab did not believe in the one, true God. Instead, they worshipped all different kinds of idols. It was hard for Elimelech and Naomi to live in such a place, far from family and far from those who worshipped God. Then another terrible thing happened. Naomi's husband died and she was left with only her two sons. Her sons married women from Moab and that brings us to Ruth. Ruth from Moab married one of Naomi's sons.

Ruth had grown up in a family that worshipped idols and she was not a part of God's special nation, the Israelites. She was very much an outsider, but over time she came to believe in the true God that her mother-in-law, Naomi, believed in.

As if life had not been hard enough for Naomi, it got worse. Both of her sons died there in Moab and she was left with only her two daughters-in-law. Naomi was so sad and discouraged and depressed and bitter that her appearance even changed. She was a sad, sad woman.

After about ten years in Moab, news reached Naomi that the famine back in Bethlehem was over. This was the first good news she had heard in a long, long time and she began to pack up her belongings to return to her hometown. She called her daughters-in-law together and told them of her plans.

"I will be leaving soon to return to my hometown," she said. "You girls have been very good to me, but there is really no reason for you to go with me. Your family is here to take care of you and perhaps you can find new husbands here."

All three of them wept together and both of the daughters-in-law said they would move to Bethlehem with Naomi. "No, no, my girls," said Naomi. "Go back to your families."

One daughter-in-law was convinced and told Naomi good-bye. But not Ruth!

"I will not go back to my family and its idols," insisted Ruth. "You are my family now, your God is my God now, and your nation is my nation now." When Naomi saw how persistent Ruth was and how she now trusted in the one, true God, she agreed that she would come with her.

When they arrived in Bethlehem they were both very poor because they did not have husbands who owned farms or worked in a trade and could take care of them. Instead, every day Ruth would go out into the fields where the farmers were harvesting wheat.

She would pick up what they dropped or left behind and bring it home. It wasn't much, but it was enough for the two of them to live on, one day at a time.

All this time, Ruth was learning how to trust God. Even though he was not the god she has been taught about as a child, she believed in him now. Even though she was not descended from Abraham, she believed in Abraham's God and she attached herself to Abraham's family. God saw this and God welcomed her into his family.

You see, Ruth's story teaches us that God turns outsiders into insiders. When people believe in him and trust him, he welcomes them into a very special relationship no matter where they are from. You don't have to look a certain way, you don't have to be from a certain family or a certain place, you don't have to be wealthy or poor in order to have a relationship with God. God welcomes anyone who trusts him.

Later God gave Ruth another special relationship. A farmer by the name of Boaz noticed her in his field one day and, to make a long story short, he married her. Boaz loved Ruth very much and they had a son and their son became the grandfather of the great king David. What a long way Ruth had come! And what wonderful news for us that we, too, can have a relationship with God, no matter who we are or where we are from!