

Women in the Bible: Ruth

Scripture: Ruth chapters 1- 4

- Grab your Bible and read through the whole book of Ruth; it is an interesting read in its entirety and not too long. If you don't want to read all of it, focus on chapter 3
- What jumps out at you?

Background Information:

Ruth

- Speaks 212 words
- She is loyal, courageous, resilient, hard-working and embodies a God-filled sacred kindness in the way she commits herself to and cares for Naomi
- Ruth is a foreigner in Bethlehem, she comes from a country with deep tensions with the Israelites, yet she commits herself to their (our) God

Naomi

- Speaks 411 words
- Woman of deep faith who is strategic and stubborn: everything was taken from her and she permitted herself to sit in her sorrow until her daughter in law Ruth gave her a way out of her poverty
- Ultimate matchmaker in her plans to get Ruth and Boaz together thus ensuring the safety and security of both women

Things to Consider:

- Ruth is the only book in the Bible named for a foreign woman. The only other book in the Bible named for a woman is Esther.
- Ordinary people can (and do) change the course of history for the better by acting out of loyalty and love
- Even after enduring widowhood, poverty, and suffering, Ruth is able to get a new start and build a family that would ultimately change the world
- Women who glean are seen as the poorest people in society. It was temporary as it only happened during harvest season and it was risky because people could fight over the slim pickings. Ruth and Naomi needed more security, or they might have starved.

Reflection Questions:

- God is working indirectly through the interactions of the people and the blessings throughout the book. How might this story help you see the way God is working in your own life?
- Where have you experienced a God-filled sacred kindness in our own life?
- This is one of the most beloved stories in the Bible, why might that be?
- How do you see race influence actions in this story? Where do you see race or designation as a foreigner, impacting society today?
- How do the women in Bethlehem go from being gossipy and curious to celebratory and affirming? Their presence in the story is important and also changes drastically.
- What are some similarities and differences between the relationship of Ruth and Naomi compared to that of Sarah and Hagar?

If you are interested in reading or discovering more about the story of Ruth, check out some of these resources. I own all of these books and love them. I also included art to look at for those of you interested in looking at the ways art and interpretation influence each other. Feel free to send me any resources that you find!

Further Reading:

- Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible: Bringing to Life the Ancient World of Scripture
- Bible Women: All Their Words and Why They Matter by Lindsay Hardin Freeman
- All of the Women of the Bible by Edith Deen
- Women's Bible Commentary by Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley
- Just Wives? Stories of Power and Survival in the Old Testament and Today by Katharine Doob Sakenfeld
- Life: Women of the Bible special edition magazine printed in 2019
- Article: <http://www.womeninthebible.net/bible-paintings/ruth-naomi/>

Art to Consider:

I love looking at the way art can influence our perspective on stories. Check out some of these artistic representations of Ruth and her story. How do they change or impact how you view the story?

Whither Thou Goest by Sandy Freckleton Gagon

Ruth's Story by Thomas Matthew Rooke

Naomi and her daughters in law by Chagall

Ruth: Painting the Torah by Eli Ana

God's Story: Ruth and Naomi: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=irThVpdeSXk>

**If you know of or find other artistic depictions, please feel free to send it along!