**The Loyalty of Ruth**

Students will

1. Understand that the story of Ruth encourages us to value loyalty to family and friends as a sign of God's strength in us
2. Develop a sense of the importance of the virtue of loyalty
3. Learn the value of obedience to God's plan for us

Content:

Do you remember a time when someone was loyal to you? How did it feel?

Why do you think it is important to be loyal?

What if someone who is your friend abandoned you in a time of crisis, what would be your reaction?

How do people show loyalty within a family?

The story of Ruth is one of the most beautiful in the Bible. It is a peaceful story, reflecting many of the customs of early Israel. Ruth is remembered for her great example of faithful love.

It shows the blessings that came to her as a result of her loyalty to her mother-in-law, Naomi, and to the God of the Israelites.

Naomi and her family had fled from Bethlehem to Moab during a famine.

Naomi's husband, Elimelech, died.

Her two sons Mahlon and Chilion married Moabite women: Ruth and Orpah.

After about ten years both her sons died and Naomi decided to return to her own people in Bethlehem.

She told her daughters-in-law that they should remain in Moab and go back to their families. Orpah reluctantly decided to stay. However Ruth insisted on going with Naomi. (Ruth 1:16-17) “Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die—there will I be buried.”

Ruth and Naomi traveled together to Bethlehem. They arrived at the beginning of the harvest. To support her mother-in-law and herself she went into the fields to collect the left over crops after the farmers had collected the barley.

The field where she was collecting belonged to a man named Boaz. He was kind to her because he had heard of her loyalty to Naomi. He instructed his men not to harm her, and to leave some of the crop behind so that she could collect.

Ruth told Naomi about Boaz' kindness. He was actually a close relative of Naomi’s late husband.

Although he wanted to marry her he could not as there was a closer relation (kinsman redeemer - so the deceased would not lose all their land). He approached this person who gave up his right to marry her (handed over his shoe). Boaz and Ruth could then get married.

Due to the fact that she gave up everything to help Naomi, she found happiness in her marriage.

God also rewarded Ruth in another way.

Through her marriage, she became the great grandmother of David, Israel’s greatest king. It was from this house of David that Jesus the Messiah was born.

Some additional notes:

1. Laws of family inheritance (Num. 27:8-11): if a man died without a son, the inheritance would be transferred to the daughter, and since Ruth was the widow of Machlon, she was the legal heir of the line of Elimelech. In other words, if Boaz could be persuaded to marry Ruth, then he could redeem the land and save the family from being obliterated in Israel.
2. Laws of yibbum or “levirate marriage” (Deut. 25:5-10): Naomi understood that Boaz was a “near kinsman” to her husband Elimelech, and therefore he was qualified to redeem her land from those who presently were leasing it. Recall that the Torah allowed for the redemption of land based on its pro rata value before the year of Jubilee. The “law of redemption” required that a next of kin had the duty to redeem (buy back) the land of their close relative if the relative was in such financial difficulty that he was forced to sell it: ‘If your brother becomes impoverished and sells some of his property, then his near redeemer shall and redeem what his brother has sold” (Lev. 25:25). Since Naomi was destitute, she needed to persuade a close relative to redeem her land for the legacy of her family’s name in Israel.
3. Various farming laws regarding leaving food for the poor and the stranger (Lev. 19:9-10; 23:22; Deut. 24:19)