

A Good Shepherd
Sacred Story

Ruth and Naomi

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RUTH AND NAOMI MATERIALS

- small wicker basket to hold:
 - wooden figure of Naomi
 - wooden figure of Orpah
 - wooden figure of Ruth
 - wooden figure of Boaz



Naomi



Boaz



Ruth



RUTH AND NAOMI ...• RUTH 1, 2, 3, 4

ACTIONS

After speaking, stand and get the story from 'it's shelf. Return to the circle and sit down, placing the basket next to you.

As you sit in silence, stroke one of the wooden figures to center yourself and the children.

Place the Naomi figure in the center.

Move the Naomi figure six inches to the right.

Place Ruth and Orpah next to Naomi on the right.

Move the three women figures back left, toward the center of the storytelling area.

Gesture to the right.

Gently touch the Naomi figure and speak very sadly.

Move the Orpah figure far away to the right and into the story basket. Then rest your hand briefly on the Ruth figure.

WORDS

Watch carefully where I go to get this story so you will know where to find it if you choose to make this story your work today or another day.

All the words to this story are inside of me. Will you please make silence with me so I can find all the words to share this story of God's people with you?

Once there was a woman named Naomi, who was one of the Jewish people of God.

She and her husband and her two sons had gone to the gentile country of Moab when there was a famine in Judah.

There her husband died. Then her two sons married gentile women. These women did not understand that Yahweh was the true God.

Later both of her sons died and Naomi and her two daughters-in-law started back to the land of the Jewish people of God.

Naomi told her daughters-in-law to go back to their parents homes and find new husbands.

Both of the women were very sad because they loved Naomi like she was their mother.

One woman, Orpah, went back to her mother's home. But the other woman, Ruth, said she would stay with Naomi forever.

Nod once or twice as you speak.

Move Naomi and Ruth together, a little to the left.

Touch the women figures gently.

Move Ruth slightly to the right and move Naomi farther still to the right.

Place the Boaz figure fairly close to Ruth.

Touch first Ruth and then Naomi.

Move Boaz closer to Ruth.

Lift both hands as though puzzled.

Touch the Ruth figure and nod as you speak.

Move the Ruth figure to the right to be near Naomi.

Move Ruth next to Boaz and then back to Naomi two or three times.

Move the Ruth and Naomi figures very close to each other.

She promised Naomi that she would go wherever Naomi went. She would worship Naomi's God and Naomi's land, would be her land.

Together the two women went back to Bethlehem in Judah.

When the women got back to Bethlehem they were very poor.

So Ruth went to the fields where men were harvesting. The Hebrew people would let the widows pick up any extra wheat that fell after the harvest.

Ruth went to the field of a very rich man named Boaz.

When Boaz saw her he asked other people who she was. They told him the story about Naomi.

Then Boaz went up to Ruth and told her that she should pick up wheat only in his field and that he would protect her.

Ruth asked him why he was being so nice to her.

Boaz told her that he had heard about how kindly she was treating Naomi and how faithful she was to her, even leaving her own land to come here with Naomi.

Ruth told Naomi all that happened. Naomi told Ruth it was a good thing God had done for them.

Ruth worked in the fields of Boaz all through the harvest.

Then Naomi talked with Ruth, telling her how she could show her love for Boaz.

Touch the Boaz figure briefly.

Move the Boaz figure to two or three different spots.

Nod your head as you speak.

Move the Boaz and Ruth figures together in the center of the storytelling area.

Cradle your arms as though holding a baby.

Gently emphasize the names of Obed, Jesse and David.

Carefully place all the figures back in the story basket.

Boaz was very pleased when he found out that Ruth loved him.

He made all the arrangements with the family of Ruth's husband to be sure there was no other relative who wished to marry her and buy the land Naomi's husband had owned.

These were customs in Israel at the time.

Since there was no other relative who wished to marry Ruth, Boaz and Ruth were married.

Later they had a son who they named Obed.

Obed later had a son named Jesse, who was the father of David, who killed the giant and became king of Israel.

WONDERING QUESTIONS:

I wonder if Ruth was ever lonely in her new land?

I wonder why Boaz didn't tell Ruth that he loved her?

I wonder if God smiled when Ruth and Boaz were married?

I wonder if it mattered that Ruth wasn't a Jew as a child?

Watch carefully how I put these materials away so you will know how to use them if you choose to make this story your work today or another day.

After speaking, stand and return the story to its place on the shelf. Return to the circle and sit down.

Watch carefully where I return this story so you will know where to find it if you choose to make this story your work today or another day.

Be sure all the children have an opportunity to choose their activity before you dismiss them to their work.

It's time for us to choose our work for today. Let's go around the circle and decide.

RUTH AND NAOMI. ... TEACHER HELPS

The story of Ruth, much like the story of Jonah, is again probably in response to the narrow-minded teaching of the prophets Ezra and Nehemiah. These prophets lived during the time the Jews returned to Jerusalem from Babylon. Then no foreign wives had been allowed to remain with their Jewish husbands. Faithfully, Jewish men were called on to "put away" their foreign wives. There was no place in their teachings for allowing the gentile women a place in their lives even if they remained faithful to Jewish laws and traditions. Rather it was a strong statement of purity. The Jewish heritage must be preserved.

The book of Ruth responds with two important themes. One is, obviously, that gentile women should be welcomed into the Jewish community and should be given full rights as a Jew. The second theme is that it is through this woman that we trace the ancestry of David.

It is a love story, a story of loyalty and a story of joy after tragedy. It is a particularly non-judgmental story as Orpah is not condemned for going back to her other gods after the death of her Jewish husband. There is much encouragement from Naomi as she helps Ruth find a husband. She does not condemn Ruth for seeking Boaz as a husband, but rather helps her with the process. I have dealt with the somewhat difficult scene of Ruth creeping into Boaz's tent after he's passed out from too much strong drink very simply. I've merely told the children that Naomi helped Ruth understand how to show Boaz that she loved him. If older children ask specific questions about the story, particularly after reading it in the Bible, be very direct with them. Do help them to understand that this was not an unusual act for a woman in Old Testament times. If they want to know why it wasn't told in the story, tell them that not all the children in the class are prepared to deal with this part of the story. Be sure to tell them how glad you are that they felt like talking about the story. Also, praise them for reading the Bible!

For the children this is simply another story of how God loves all people. Many of them will be excited to find that they are learning about King David's great-grandmother. Others will just be pleased that things turned out well for both Ruth and Naomi. We do explain briefly in the story that Moabites are gentiles who did not follow Yahweh. Of course, this will be more meaningful for the older children than for the younger ones. If older children have questions about the role of the Moabites, be sure to allow some "talk time" during the time of work/art

response to discuss with them the gentiles and the feelings toward the gentiles when this story took place.

The wondering questions begin with one that all children can relate to; being lonely when you're away from home. You will get responses from children who have moved and even from those who have gone away on vacation or an overnight at a friend's house.

The second question asks why Boaz didn't initiate the conversation. This question is to help very extroverted children understand that it's not always easy for someone to talk about a subject or even to talk at all!

The third wondering question asks about God's response. Almost all of the children will probably be positive about this one. There may be a few children who carry with them the attitudes of parents who believed that Methodist should marry Methodists and Catholics should marry Catholics and never should they intermarry.

The final question relates to the third. Older children will probably respond by saying that if it was important to God, then God would not have made Ruth's son the great grandfather of David. Little ones will merely say "No" or "No, 'cause God loves everybody". That response shows a true understanding of the story of Ruth and Naomi.

It was after the Exile that the Hebrew people were first called Jews. The name was given to the Hebrews because of their land of origin, Judah, and/or possibly in reference to the city of Jerusalem. For the sake of consistency within the sacred stories we will call these people the Hebrew people of God in the telling of the stories. However, in these helps they will be referred to as the Jewish people.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR OLDER CHILDREN

Ruth chose to stay with Naomi instead of going back to her family. Share a time when your friends have been as important to you (or more important) than your family.

The people of God had a tradition of letting poor people harvest anything that was left in the fields instead of going back and getting every bit of it for themselves. What can we do today to give people who are poor dignity when they need help getting food and shelter?

Naomi and Ruth plotted together to find a way for Ruth to entice Boaz. How do you think God felt about their "less than honest" approach with Boaz? How do you feel about it being part of the Bible?

In this story there is much meaning given to the names people have. Do you know what your name means? If you could have any other name what would it be and why? (Teacher: a book of names and meanings is very helpful for this exercise.)