

Ruth 1

Aim of lesson

To learn from Ruth's loyalty and love for Naomi and for God.

Background study

Look for information about the effects of famine in Canaan.

Suggested outline of lesson

There are many points of interest arising out of this lesson, but do not be led away from the main theme of Ruth's love for Naomi, and for the God of Israel. This story is about a woman who was as kind to her husband's mother as daughters usually are to their own mothers.

Ask the children how they show their love for the members of their family. Do they simply say: "I love you"? What do they do to show their love?

Famine

Sketch the background of the departure of Naomi and Elimelech from Bethlehem in Judah, and their journey of some sixty miles across the Jordan and around the Dead Sea to Moab. Make sure the meaning of famine, with its far-reaching effects on a farming community, is clearly understood. It could have been going on for several years and very real hardship and suffering may have driven this family away from their homeland. Shortly after their arrival in Moab, Elimelech died, perhaps having suffered from prolonged malnutrition and the arduous journey. The meanings of the names of Naomi's sons, Mahlon (sickly) and Chilion (pining or wasting) suggests some hereditary weakness. Both men died young.

Ten years in Moab

While in Moab, Naomi's two sons married girls from that land. Write down the names of Naomi, Orpah and Ruth in order to help the children to remember them as the story continues. Their stay in Moab lasted ten years, by the end of which time the women had been left on their own.

Ask the children to try and imagine what it would be like to be living away from their home country with no relatives nearby? Perhaps some of them have experienced this, and will know why Naomi wanted to return home to Bethlehem, especially having heard, perhaps from travelling merchants, that the famine was over.

Your people shall be my people ...

Describe the planning of the journey and the packing up of her home. Show Naomi's concern that her daughters-in-law should not leave their country, their families and friends. Stress the love and care which Ruth and Orpah had both shown to Naomi, and their desire to accompany her in spite of her attempts to persuade them to stay in Moab.

Both girls wept at the thought of parting from Naomi. However, Orpah did decide to return to her home, but Ruth clung to Naomi and refused to let her go on alone. Repeat the lovely words which Ruth spoke (v16). If you are using the Authorised Version it will be necessary to explain the word “entreat” and a modern Bible translation, or paraphrase of the words, will be helpful.

... and your God my God

During her time of living with the family of Naomi, Ruth had come to learn about and believe in the great God of Israel. No longer could she worship the Moabite gods of wood and stone, and it was the love Ruth had for the true God which was one of the important factors in her decision to stay with Naomi, no matter what the outcome might be. Her faith would, no doubt, be a source of strength and an inspiration to the older woman.

Describe the remainder of the journey to Bethlehem. Naomi now had the company of this brave daughter-in-law as she walked (or rode a donkey) round the northern part of the Dead Sea, crossed the River Jordan and then climbed the hills of Judah. They finally reached Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest in April, a time of joy and celebration.

Back in Bethlehem

Ask the children whether they have any ideas about the greeting Naomi might have received after ten years' absence? Would any people in the town recognize her and remember the day she had left with her husband and two sons? In spite of past sorrows, Naomi could see the hand of God in all that had happened to her in Moab and recognized that he had now brought her safely home. Naomi still trusted the God of Israel and believed that he would help her and Ruth in their life together in Bethlehem.

Relevance to the children's lives

Do you know what it means to be loyal? Ruth was loyal, both to God and to Naomi. She believed in God and was determined to put her trust in him. She loved Naomi and was determined not to leave her. How can we show loyalty to our families, our friends and to God?

Worksheets

Then footprints read 'Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God'.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, we want to be like Ruth and put our love and loyalty for you above everything. Please help us also to be loyal to our families and friends. Amen.

Memory verse

“Where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God” (Ruth 1:16).