



RUTH



Lesson 9 Ruth 1 - 4

What happened before?

Our previous study concluded the book of Judges. The period of the judges was a time of violence and destruction. Most of the people were disobedient, but there were some who still trusted in God.

Bible Story

The story of Ruth is a beautiful story that shows us a good deal about the daily life in Israel. It also shows us several things about the customs of the time. Ruth lived during the time that the Judges ruled.

A man named Elimelech lived in Bethlehem with his wife Naomi and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. One year the harvest had been so poor that Elimelech could not get enough food for his family. They decided to leave Israel until the famine was over and go to live in the nearby country of Moab. While there, the two sons married Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah. Elimelech died in the land of Moab and after a few years, the two sons also died. That left only Naomi and her two daughters-in-law.

When Naomi heard that God had ended the famine in the land of Judah, she decided to return to Bethlehem. Her two daughters-in-law started out with her on the journey home. When they came to the border of the land of Moab, she told the two women that they would be strangers in the land of Israel and would be better off if they went back to their mother's house.

One of the daughters-in-law, Orpah, did return to her people. But the other one, Ruth, wanted to stay with Naomi. Again, Naomi told her that it would be better for her to be among her own people, but Ruth insisted that she wanted to go wherever Naomi went. She wanted Naomi's people to be her people. The people of Moab worshipped idols. Ruth understood that going with Naomi meant she would be in a land where the people worshipped the true God. Ruth wanted the true God of Naomi to be her God.

Naomi's old friends and neighbors were excited when she and Ruth arrived at Bethlehem. The women asked, "Is this Naomi?" She told them not to call her Naomi; she wanted to be called Marah. Naomi means

“pleasant,” but Marah means “bitter.” Naomi felt that God had dealt very bitterly with her by allowing her husband and sons to die.

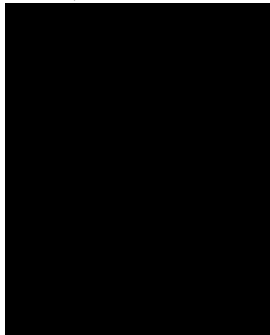
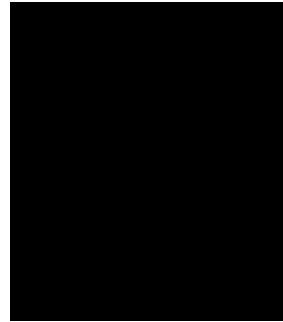
It was the time of the barley harvest when they came to Bethlehem. The poor people of Israel were permitted to go into a field during the harvest and pick up any grain that was dropped by the harvesters. The Law of Moses declared that the owner of a field was not to pick up anything that was dropped, and also he was not to cut every stalk of grain; those in the corners and along the sides of the field were to be left for the poor. Because Ruth and Naomi had so little, they were allowed to participate in the gleaning. Ruth went into a field to gather food behind the reapers. Boaz was the owner of the field and was actually related to Naomi’s dead husband, Elimelech. When he came out from Bethlehem to the fields, he asked who the strange woman was who was gleaning in his field. They told him that she was the Moabitess who had come back from Moab with Naomi.

Boaz called Ruth to him and told her not to go into any other field, but to remain with his people for gleaning. Ruth was very grateful and asked why she had found favor in his sight. Boaz replied that he had heard of how kind Ruth had been to Naomi, and how she had come into a land of strange people. Boaz was a man of faith. He pronounced a prayer of blessing upon Ruth and asked that God would repay and reward her for all she had done for Naomi.

At mealtime, Ruth ate with the reapers and they all treated her with kindness. When she returned to work, Boaz gave his reapers instructions to purposely drop grain where Ruth was so she could easily gather plenty for herself and Naomi. When Ruth went home that evening, she and Naomi were both very happy over the good treatment she had received. Then Naomi told Ruth that Boaz was related to them. Naomi knew it was the practice among the Israelites, that if a man died without children, the next of kin who was not married was to take the wife.

Ruth gleaned in the field of Boaz until the end of the harvest. Then, Naomi thought of a plan to get Boaz to take Ruth as his wife. Naomi told Ruth to go down to the threshing floor where Boaz would be sleeping that night, uncover his feet and lay down nearby. When he awakened (possibly because his feet were cold), Boaz was very surprised when he saw Ruth at his feet. Ruth asked Boaz to marry her and take care of her. Boaz knew what a kind and good person Ruth was and he was more than willing to marry her, but there was a problem. He was not the nearest kinsman; there was another ahead of him! If the other kinsman wanted, he could take Ruth as his wife. Before Ruth went back into the city, Boaz told her to hold her shawl and he filled it with barley.

Early the next morning, Boaz arranged a meeting with the man who was next of kin and ten elders of the city. Boaz told the kinsman that there was a piece of land that had belonged to Elimelech, but had been sold. He went on to say that it was only right that the land stay in the family and since he was the next of kin, he should buy it. The kinsman agreed to buy it, but Boaz told him if he bought the land, he had to take Naomi's daughter-in-law as part



of the deal. Taking her as a wife, he would be obligated to bear children by her and then the land would belong to those children. In effect, the land would stay in Elimelech's family and would never really belong to the kinsman. At this point, the kinsman backed out.

Boaz was now free to buy the land and marry Ruth! As a sign to show that both men agreed to the arrangement, the man pulled off his shoe and gave it to Boaz. This was a custom that showed a man was giving up any claim to an inheritance. All that belonged to Elimelech now belonged to Boaz. He was glad to buy the land, because he was glad to have Ruth as his wife.

In process of time, Ruth bore a son to Boaz. Since Naomi was left without any sons, this son (in a sense) became hers. This would carry on the heritage of her husband Elimelech. The women of the city praised God for what He had done for Naomi. They warmly accepted Ruth and proclaimed her to be better to Naomi than seven sons would have been. The son born to Ruth was named Obed. Obed was the father of Jesse; Jesse was the father of King David. Ruth was David's great-grandmother.



Though Ruth and Naomi lived in a bad time and experienced many hardships, in the end God richly blessed them. This beautiful story not only praises Ruth for her loyalty, but shows how a Gentile woman came to be in the lineage of David, and ultimately, in the lineage of Christ.

