



Bible Study

Ruth

Ruth 1

The book of Ruth is a powerful story of how God has His sovereign hand upon our lives and brings His purposes to fruition through even the most unlikely people. Most of the story takes place in Bethlehem and the main characters are Naomi, Ruth and Boaz. Of course, Bethlehem would be the place where David grew up and would later become the birthplace of our Lord Jesus. As we will see, Ruth was an important part of God's plan for the future and her faithfulness is an example to us all.

Famine

The story begins in Bethlehem, which was going through a time of famine. This was especially sad because Bethlehem means 'house of bread'. However, at this time, it had become very difficult to get food so Naomi's husband, Elimelech, decides that the family should leave Bethlehem and go to live in the country of Moab. The reason for leaving was the famine and it is likely that, in the culture of the day, Naomi would have had little choice but to go with her husband.

Tragedy

In Moab, Elimelech dies and Naomi is left as a widow with their two sons. Each son marries a Moabite woman but about 10 years later, both sons die. We don't know how they died but they each leave a childless widow, one of whom is Ruth. Widows are hard-pressed at any time and in any culture but at this time in history, it would have brought particular hardship upon them.

Naomi Decides to Return to Bethlehem

Naomi receives news that the famine has ceased and that there is food in her home town of Bethlehem. She begins her journey home with both of her daughters-in-law but then urges them to go back and live in their own land, so that they might each find another husband among their own people. Neither of the daughters-in-law had children and they were very attached to Naomi, so this was an emotional time with much weeping and sadness. They were willing to go with Naomi to Bethlehem and live with her people but Naomi felt that they would have a better future in their own country. The daughter-in-law, Orpah, is very sad but eventually decides to leave. However, Ruth is absolutely determined to go with Naomi and stay with her for the rest of her life.

Ruth's Commitment to Naomi

Ruth has clearly thought through the implications of leaving her own country and she makes some very solemn and clear statements. Firstly, she declares that she will go and stay wherever Naomi goes and stays. This shows the strength of her desire to be with Naomi. Secondly, she says that Naomi's people will be her people. She realises that when she

arrives in Bethlehem, she must become as one with the people of that nation and she is ready to sacrifice her cultural identity as a woman from Moab, to live as a citizen of Israel. Thirdly, she states that Naomi's God will be her God. We don't know what 'gods' Ruth may have been worshipping but it becomes clear that she wants to serve Naomi's God. Despite Naomi's grief and sadness, Ruth has been fully persuaded by Naomi's character and by the God that Naomi loves and serves. Finally, Ruth says that where Naomi dies, she also will die and be buried. In some parts of the world, culture would dictate that, when someone dies, the body should be taken back to the place of their birth for burial. However, Ruth is making it very clear that she will permanently commit to being part of Naomi's family and culture.

Ruth's Commitment to God

As well as caring for Naomi, Ruth clearly has a very deep sense that what she does in her life matters to God. Her words express her love and undying commitment to Naomi, for which she is absolutely committed to being answerable to the Lord!

Naomi's Respect for God's Will

When Naomi arrives in Bethlehem, there is a lot of interest in the town. Naomi was obviously well known and even after at least 10 years of absence, she is remembered with favour. Her name means pleasant but Naomi states that the bitter tragedy that has unfolded for her, with the loss of her husband and sons, has all been by God's sovereign hand. Her sorrow is very deep but she still shows her respect for God's will and speaks of Him as the Lord Almighty!

God's Perfect Timing

Naomi and Ruth arrive in Bethlehem, right at the start of the barley harvest. Already, we begin to understand that their arrival is perfectly timed, according to the will of the Lord and that a harvest is about to be reaped, from which they will each benefit!

Points to Consider:

1. How well do we respond to tragedy and extreme difficulty when they affect our lives?
2. What do you think inspired the two daughters-in-law to support Naomi's decision to return to Bethlehem?
3. Ruth's commitment is very clear. In what way do her choices illustrate what it means to be a true disciple of the Lord Jesus?
4. The fear of God was very strong upon Ruth. Why do people today seem to be less serious about following Jesus?
5. Look at Naomi's testimony concerning God's dealings with her. In your own words, how would you describe her feelings?

Ruth 2

Naomi and Ruth are now living in Bethlehem. Ruth is a foreigner in this country but Naomi has come back home. This chapter shows us how much readjustment the two women have to make and there are lessons for us, about how we should respond to changes in our lives.

Harvest Time

Naomi and Ruth were both widowed and very poor, so Ruth asks Naomi to let her go and pick up the leftover grain in the harvest fields. At that time, farmers were not supposed to pick up grain that had been dropped or missed by the harvesters. Instead, this was to be left to be gathered by people in need. Ruth gains permission to do this in a field belonging to Boaz, who was one of Naomi's close relatives.

Boaz

God guides Ruth to go and glean in the field that belongs to Boaz. Boaz was a godly man of some importance, as well as being a wealthy farmer who employed many workers. When he sees Ruth and discovers who she is, he tells his men not to touch her, he asks her to stay in his field and not to go elsewhere and he tells her that she may drink from the water jars.

God's Protection

Boaz knows something of Ruth's background and he thinks very highly of what she has done to support Naomi. His description of Ruth as taking refuge 'under the wings' of the God of Israel, is a very wonderful picture of God's protection. It is a place of safety and a place of comfort. It is good for each one of us to seek to live 'under the wings' of God.

Kindness and Love

Ruth is surprised and grateful that Boaz is offering her kindness that she has done nothing to deserve. However, there is something else happening here. Boaz is curious about Ruth and, as we will see later, this will lead to him falling in love with her. Of course, there are many different ways that people meet and fall in love but the story of Ruth is also an illustration of God's love to us, undeserving sinners, as He leads us from a place of danger to a place of safety.

Naomi's Faith

When Ruth returns home, Naomi is amazed and encouraged to see how much grain Ruth has gathered, so Ruth tells her about Boaz and what he has done for her that day. Naomi has suffered much grief and loss but her faith is still strong and her desire is for the Lord's

blessing to be upon Boaz. She encourages Ruth to remain in the safe company of his workers until the end of the harvest and she also begins to realise that Boaz might be about to play an important part in their future!

A Family Redeemer

As a close relative to Naomi, Boaz was able to be what was known as a family redeemer. The law of that time required that, when a brother or male relative died childless, an unmarried brother or male relative should marry the widow and that any children from that marriage would inherit as if born to the deceased man, thus redeeming his family line and inheritance. However, there was an order to this process and Boaz was not the closest relative who could take on this responsibility for Ruth, the childless widow of Elimelech and Naomi's son, Mahlon.

God's Greater Plan

Naomi has already begun to sense that God has a greater plan in mind and we begin to see how God brings His people comfort and provision by His grace and mercy. Ruth had no rights but God raises someone up to protect her in her hour of need. As we continue in the book of Ruth, we will see how, in many ways, Boaz is an illustration of our Lord Jesus. There was no reason why Jesus should care for us and there was no reason why he should seek to redeem us, but he chose to do so and we are grateful that, in him, we have eternal security!

Points to Consider:

1. How well do we respond when faced with great changes in our lives?
2. Do we rely upon our wealth and influence, rather than putting our faith in God?
3. Boaz showed much kindness to Ruth. How do we show our care for others?
4. God provided for Ruth in a foreign land. Do we believe that he will also provide for us?
5. God had a plan for Ruth. Are you ready to follow His plan for your life?

Ruth 3

In this chapter, the relationship between Ruth and Boaz moves up to a new level. Naomi has sensed that God is working in the relationship between the farmer and the girl from Moab and so, she has a plan for how to move things forward.

Naomi's Concern for Ruth's Future

Naomi wanted Ruth to have a home where she would be provided for. We are not told the ages of any of the people in this story but it is likely that Naomi was quite old and she wanted to be sure that Ruth would have a secure future.

Ruth's Obedience

Boaz has already showed much kindness towards Ruth and Naomi feels that he would be probably be willing to marry Ruth and provide for her future. Ruth trusts Naomi and carefully obeys her instructions to watch from a distance and see where Boaz goes to sleep. Once he is asleep, Ruth uncovers his feet and lies down. To many of us, this seems to be a very strange ritual but, in those days, it was an acceptable way for Ruth to demonstrate her respect for Boaz and seek his protection. Of course, there was a risk that her actions might offend Boaz but Ruth is faithfully following Naomi's instructions. God uses many different ways to bring people together and Ruth's obedience is rewarded.

Ruth's Request

Having been startled by waking in the night to find Ruth lying at his feet, Boaz is delighted when she respectfully asks him to spread the corner of his garment over her and be her family redeemer. Ruth knew that she was vulnerable and she was seeking his protection and support in a dangerous world. As well as being a widow, Ruth was a Moabite and she needed Boaz to rescue her from many potential dangers. Our family redeemer is Christ. We are vulnerable and we are damaged by sin but Jesus came to rescue us!

The Response of Boaz

Once again, Boaz responds with kindness and love. He is very honoured that this young lady should think so highly of him and ask for his help. Although he is someone of good character and a person of influence, he sees Ruth's request not as an obligation but, in fact, a blessing and a privilege for him. When we ask the Lord Jesus to redeem us, we find that his love is so great towards us, we do not need to persuade him to save us. He wants to save us!

Respect for Culture

Boaz is an honourable man who clearly has a real love for Ruth. However, he knows that there is a relative in his family who is closer to Naomi than he is, so he will do things legally and thoroughly and give no opportunity for accusation. What Boaz shows is that, as a respected man in his community, he fully observes the requirements and traditions of his culture. When we do things in the right way, God will bless us. We must not be impatient or distracted by our emotions and we need to show our respect for other people and the law. For example, even the Lord Jesus told the lepers that he had healed, to go to the priest and fulfil the cultural requirements, even though they already knew that the leprosy had gone.

Patience

Boaz now has things that he must do, so he gives Ruth a considerable quantity of barley to bless both her and Naomi. The two women now have to wait patiently. Sometimes, when we have done everything that we can do, we have to be patient, leave things with God and be willing to accept the outcome.

Points to Consider:

1. Do we understand how to balance our respect for culture with listening to God, so that there is no unnecessary conflict?
2. Ruth's willingness to go to the threshing floor was very courageous. How prepared are we to obey God when the outcome may be uncertain?
3. In marriage, do we see our responsibility to love and protect as a blessing and a privilege, rather than an obligation?
4. Are we truly willing to patiently trust God and accept His will for us?
5. In what ways can we see Boaz as an illustration of Christ?

Ruth 4

This is the story of how everything comes together, in accordance with God's greater plan. We see how Boaz patiently clears the way to marry Ruth and we learn that their marriage leads to the birth of a son, Obed, who was a forefather of King David. Many years later, in the opening verses of his gospel, Matthew records the genealogy of our Lord Jesus Christ, which includes the names of Boaz, Ruth and Obed.

Boaz at the Town Gate

This was a public place, where the elders of the town would gather. Boaz wants to speak with the family redeemer, the nearest relative to Naomi, in the presence of witnesses, so he waits there until this man comes along. Often, when there are decisions to be made, it becomes very important to have witnesses.

Boaz has a strategy. He tells the family redeemer that Naomi is selling the land that belonged to Naomi's late husband, Elimelech. As the nearest relative, this man had first right to buy the land and Boaz suggests that he does so. However, if the man does not wish to buy the land then Boaz wants to know, as he was next in line with the right to buy.

The initial response of the family redeemer is that he will buy the land but, now, Boaz moves on to the real purpose of this discussion. He informs the man that on buying the land, he also acquires the widow, Ruth, to preserve her family line and property. On hearing this, the family redeemer changes his mind, as he does not want to endanger the rights of his own family estate by marrying Ruth.

Boaz Declares His Intentions

Boaz now declares, in the presence of many witnesses, that he will fulfil his responsibility as family redeemer, buy the land and marry Ruth. Of course, as a farmer, the land would have been of interest to Boaz but it seems perfectly clear that he was mainly interested in Ruth!

When we make decisions in the body of Christ, we must not be impulsive or ruled by emotion. It is important to understand all of the facts and to act with integrity, so that what we decide is properly agreed and will not be subject to later challenge, resentment or regret.

The Witnesses Declare Their Support

The elders and the people at the gate, all declare that they are witnesses. They have already seen a godliness in Ruth and they pronounce blessings upon her, that she will be respected as other godly women in Israel were respected. There is a real sense that what is happening has far more significance than just a compassionate act. This has all come about through the

faithfulness of Naomi, who had felt that God was punishing her when she lost her husband and sons. Now she has been lifted up and God's greater purposes are being fulfilled. The child to be born to Boaz and Ruth would be part of a royal family line, which leads to the birth of Jesus, who is our ultimate Redeemer and Saviour!

God's Greater Plan

When God's Son, Jesus, came to be our Redeemer, he knew exactly what had to be done in order to secure our salvation from sin and the devil. He has compassion for the lost, he binds up the broken-hearted and he sets his people free from the curse of sin and from the powers of darkness. The shedding of his blood as an act of sacrifice, means that we now belong to him and we are released from bondage.

God loves us very much as individuals but He often has a greater plan that goes beyond simply blessing us. God saw the events that would engulf Naomi but, after years of pain and grief, there was great joy. We look to God for His grace, not just to bless our lives but that even through us, His kingdom will be established!

Points to Consider:

1. Naomi trusted God, even though she felt that He had made her life very bitter. How would we respond in the same situation?
2. How does this story help us to encourage people who are handling tragedy and sadness in their lives?
3. Do we take shortcuts or are we careful to do things properly and in a way that does not lead to later challenge?
4. Are we really willing to let other people influence or obstruct what we want to happen?
5. By following the correct procedure, Boaz risked losing both the land and Ruth. Do we trust God enough to do likewise and accept the outcome, whatever that may mean for us personally?