

Naomi and Ruth

Key Verse:

“...Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve...but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

Joshua 24:15b

Extra: What lessons can we learn about obeying God from this study?

Level 5 lesson 37

Read: Ruth 1

Further Reading: Mark 10:17-31

To complete our Old Testament lessons this year, we find a charming story in the book of Ruth. However, the book is not merely a charming, romantic story; it contains very important truths for us today! It gives details of the spiritual experience of a young Gentile woman named Ruth. She was from the heathen Moabites, an idolatrous people whose country lay east of the Dead Sea. The story tells how she was delivered from heathenism and came to know and trust in the One True God - the God of Israel.

Here’s how it happened...

DISASTER

The Book of Judges reveals that due to the hard-heartedness of the people of Israel, God repeatedly caused them to be oppressed by foreign rulers, or to suffer from droughts and subsequent famine. One day a man called Elimelech, wrongly decided to leave Judah and settle with his wife Naomi and two sons, Mahlon and Kilion, in the land of Moab. However, the harsh conditions were no justification for Elimelech forsaking God’s own land and going to live amidst the heathen Moabites where the devil was worshipped. Seeking relief there was bound to get the whole family in serious trouble - which it did. In due time, they arrived at their destination, but the very next thing we read is that Elimelech died!

Not long after this tragedy, the two sons married girls from Moab. While there was no direct rule against this (as in the case of the Canaanites), this was certainly a very unwise step for these Israelite men to marry pagan girls. In certain instances, God may mercifully over-rule for the good of the unbeliever - as He did in the case of Mahlon’s wife Ruth - but as Christians today, we cannot expect the blessing of God on our marriage (which is so vital), if we begin a relationship in disobedience to Scripture and His clearly stated will (see 2 Corinthians 6:14). Speaking generally, it usually results in trouble for both Christian and non-Christian. Oil and water don’t mix!

DEATH

Certainly, in this case, both marriages hardly knew the blessing of God; both ended suddenly through the early deaths of both Mahlon and Kilion. This left the two wives widowed and childless. Naomi, in addition to the loss of her husband, had lost her two sons and now had the two young Moabite women on her hands. What a pitiful situation! But then good news came from home saying that the famine in Judah was over because “the Lord had come to the aid of His people by providing food for them” (v6). Naomi immediately decided to return to her native land, so with her two daughters-in-law, she began the homeward journey.

As they approached the border of Judah, Naomi felt that she must proceed alone. Telling her daughters-in-law to go home to their own mother’s house, she wished them God’s blessing and kissed them goodbye. The girls protested strongly, however they didn’t want to leave her and begged to be allowed to go on with Naomi. But Naomi was adamant: she told them of the impossibility of her being able to provide them with husbands and although it grieved her terribly too, they must part. At this, point Orpah kissed Naomi a tearful goodbye and returned home.

DETERMINATION

Despite this, Ruth clung to her mother-in-law. “Don’t urge me to leave you,” she pleaded, “Your people will be my people and your God will be my God... I want to die where you die, and only to be separated by death.” What a beautiful and touching appeal, which really revealed a work of divine grace in Ruth’s heart. Naomi could not resist Ruth’s appeal and so they went on together.

Shortly after crossing over the border of the land they came to Bethlehem, the very place which Naomi and the family had left some ten years previously. The people of the town were surprised, but glad to see Naomi. She told them her sad story and then settled down with Ruth to make the best of things in her old hometown.

The important matter in this lesson is Ruth’s grand decision. She was determined (even without encouragement), to serve the God of Israel, and we would do well to follow her wonderful example!

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Why was it wrong for Elimelech to take his family to Moab?

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2. What caused Naomi to return home?

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3. Why was Naomi adamant that the girls should stay in Moab?

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4. What do you think was the chief reason for Ruth’s decision?

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5. What lessons of special value did you gain from this study?

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My Name is Age

Ruth at Work

Key Verse:

“A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”

Proverbs 18:24

Extra: Why did the barley harvest play such a role in Naomi and Ruth’s situation?

Level 5 lesson 38

Read Ruth 2

Further Reading: Psalm 140:1-8

In God’s perfect timing, Naomi and Ruth’s return home coincided with the beginning of the barley harvest. This played a large role in supplying their immediate and future needs, as we will see.

Not wanting to be a burden to Naomi in their new home, but rather be useful and helpful, Ruth asked Naomi for permission to glean (gather up) the grains of corn and barley left behind by the reapers in the fields nearby. This was a practice instituted by God himself, for the provision of the poor in Jewish society (see Leviticus 19:9-10).

Naomi agreed, and so Ruth went out, and without knowing it “she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz.” Here we see plainly, God’s continuing hand in this story - Boaz was a very wealthy man, but more significantly, he was a relation of Naomi’s deceased husband, Elimelech. One day while Ruth was busy working, Boaz visited the same field to check on the progress of the harvest. After exchanging respectful, friendly greetings with his labourers, Boaz continued his inspection.

WISDOM

Casting his eyes around the field, Boaz soon noticed the beautiful, foreign looking young woman busily working nearby. “Who is that?” he asked his foreman. His foreman went on to tell Boaz Ruth’s story and how impressed he was with her. “She has worked hard like that all day, barely without stopping!” he enthused. Now although Boaz had not met Ruth, he had heard much about her, and already knew her history. Therefore what the foreman told Boaz no doubt pleased him very much. Moving towards her he spoke kindly to her, telling her to stay in his fields and work with his servant girls. As well, she should drink from the water jars which his men had filled for his workers. In addition, He advised her of his protection, telling her that he had told the men not to bother her.

As a poor alien woman, Ruth was overcome by Boaz’s unsought kindness toward her. Humbly, she bowed before Boaz and acknowledged his grace, asking why he had treated her so nicely. Boaz responded that he had been told of her devotion to her mother-in-law in leaving her native land and people, to unite with the people of the Lord God of Israel, under whose “wings” she had come to trust. He assured her of his admiration for her, and his prayers that she would be rewarded by God for her conduct.

WELCOME

Boaz’s kindness toward Ruth continued at mealtime, inviting her to sit with the reapers and eat with them. Following the meal, Ruth went to continue gleaning, and Boaz instructed his workers to purposely drop stalks of grain, so that there would be plenty for her to gather up. Arriving home from work, Naomi questioned Ruth about the events of the day. Ruth told her mother-in-law of the wonderful day she’d had and particularly of the kindness of the field owner whose name she said was Boaz. Upon hearing the name Boaz, Naomi burst out in praise to God. “The Lord bless him. The Lord has not stopped showing His kindness to the living and the dead.” Then she explained that “Boaz is a close relation of ours. He is one of those responsible for taking care of us!”

The Law of God (Deuteronomy 25:5-10) provided for the carrying on of a family name and the building up of a deceased brother’s house (which would otherwise cease to exist) through a blood relation, or ‘Kinsman.’ Naturally, Elimelech’s family name and house was in grave danger of this as Elimelech and his two sons had all died. But with Boaz’s interest in Ruth, Naomi saw how this could be overcome. Under the law, Boaz, being a blood relation, was just the right person to redeem (purchase) Elimelech’s inheritance and marry Ruth. In this way, the family name of Elimelech could be continued and built up. No wonder Naomi was delighted! And there is an important Christian truth in this for us, as we will see next time.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Why was it significant that Ruth worked in the field of Boaz?	.....
2. What did Boaz do before continuing his inspection of the harvest?	.....
3. Under whose ‘wings’ did Boaz say Ruth had come to trust?	.....
4. What particular thing did Boaz tell his workers to do for Ruth?	.....
5. Why was Naomi delighted to hear of Boaz’s kindness to Ruth?	.....

Ruth and Boaz

Key Verse:
"Being fully persuaded that God had power to do what He had promised."

Romans 4:21

Extra: What do you think of the advice that Naomi gave to Ruth?

Level 5 lesson 39

Read Ruth 3

Further Reading: Psalm 139

If you have ever attended a Christian wedding, you will probably remember hearing words like these: "If anyone present here today knows of any reason why these two cannot be lawfully joined together in holy matrimony, let him now speak or forever hold his peace." These words are usually followed by a silent pause - during which both the bride and bridegroom hold their collective breaths! If there is no objection, the officiating Minister will continue to finalise the marriage union according to the law of the land.

CAUTIOUS PROGRESS

Similarly, it was this possibility of an objection, which made Boaz hesitate in exercising his right to redeem Naomi's inheritance, which now included Ruth. It appears from Scripture that Naomi was either unaware of any possible objection, or, had forgotten about it. In any case, she seemed to think Boaz was rather slow in exercising his kinsman responsibility and so instructed Ruth to follow the procedure outlined in verses 1-4. To our way of thinking this may seem rather strange behaviour, and even somewhat immodest. However, this was an Eastern custom, appropriate for Ruth's particular circumstances and there was certainly nothing immodest or wrong in her behaviour.

Naomi's instructions were for Ruth to go out to the field where Boaz would be winnowing the barley in the threshing floor that night. Unknown to him, she was to observe where he would lie down after his heavy evening's work and then, after he had eaten his evening meal and gone to sleep, she was to lie down at his feet. Ruth carried out the instructions exactly as Naomi had said. Around midnight, Boaz awoke fearful, aware that he was not alone as he'd thought. To his surprise, he discovered Ruth lying at his feet!

CONTINUED PROTECTION

As soon as she was recognised by Boaz, Ruth asked for his protection, stating that he was a close relative and therefore one that had a right to redeem her as part of Naomi's inheritance.

From Boaz's reply, it is obvious that there was nothing remotely immoral or suggestive in Ruth's behaviour, for he wished the Lord's blessing upon her, and extolled her as a virtuous woman. He acknowledged the fact he was a 'near kinsman,' but went on to explain the reason for his apparent slowness in discharging a kinsman's duty. "There is a kinsman nearer than I," he said. This other relative, (possibly an older brother) had the first right to the inheritance and Boaz must respect that right. If he did not, there could be an objection to his marriage of Ruth.

CAREFUL PROMISE

However, Boaz was obviously keen to pursue the matter, and promised Ruth that in the morning he would contact this "nearer kinsman" to find out if he was prepared to perform the part of a kinsman or not. If he did, that would end the matter. "But if he will not, then as the Lord lives," Boaz stated, "I will!" Boaz continued to act, as always, in a very decent and honourable manner, and we will see in the next lesson how it resulted in the removal of the difficulty. Early next morning before it was light, Ruth got up to return home, but not before Boaz had filled her veil (or apron) with a good supply of barley to take home to Naomi.

When she arrived home, Naomi quite naturally wanted to know all about what had happened and Boaz's response. Ruth told her mother-in-law the whole story, including the presence of a kinsman nearer than Boaz, who had first call on the inheritance. She also told Naomi of Boaz's promise to finalise the matter that same day, one way or the other. Naomi showed great perception of both Boaz's character and his growing love for Ruth, and advised her to wait quietly until she heard how the matter went. Then she said, "Boaz will not rest until he has settled the matter today!"

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What did Boaz say in reply to Ruth's approach to him?	.....
2. Why was Boaz slow to exercise his right to redeem?	.....
3. What did he promise to do about the matter?	.....
4. What did Ruth take home with her to Naomi?	.....
5. How did Naomi advise Ruth to act regarding Boaz's promise?	.....

Boaz and Ruth Get Married

Key Verse:
“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed.. but with the precious blood of Christ.”

1 Peter 1:18-19a

Extra: What do you see of God’s workings throughout this story?

Level 5 lesson 40

Read Ruth 4
Further Reading: Matthew 1:5-6

HONOURED PROMISE

The next morning, Boaz immediately began to honour the promise he had made to Ruth during the night. Going to the gate of the town (where all legal and business transactions were attended to and the important people of the town assembled each day), he sat down and waited. Before long, the nearer kinsman came by. Immediately Boaz called out to him, “Come over here and sit down.” The man did so and possibly with some idea of what Boaz wanted to discuss. However, this was a public matter and so Boaz then called “ten of the elders of the town” and directed them to listen and act as witnesses between him and the nearer kinsman.

HONOURABLE PURPOSE

Boaz then spelt out the situation that had arisen with regard to Elimelech’s inheritance. He pointed out to the ‘nearer kinsman’ that due to the deaths of Elimelech and his two sons, the inheritance (consisting of a certain piece of land) was for sale. As the nearest relative, the other man had first claim on it. So Boaz put the question to him plainly, “If you will redeem it, do so, but if you will not then tell me.” The ‘nearer kinsman’ promptly replied, “I will redeem it.”

In case there be any misunderstanding of what was involved, Boaz then reminded the nearer kinsman of ALL it entailed. “You will have to take Ruth the Moabite girl with the land,” he said. This all happened because Naomi had given up her title, and her family name and house could not be continued through her; whereas it could through Ruth, the younger woman.

Immediately when the ‘nearer kinsman’ heard this, he withdrew his offer on the grounds that, if he proceeded to carry it out, it might damage his own inheritance. So he gave up his right to the inheritance saying, “I cannot redeem it.” To affirm the transaction legally, he took off his shoe and gave it to Boaz.

According to local custom this meant, “You take possession.” Boaz now had complete freedom to go ahead with his plans, and so he called on the 10 elders and all the others present, to witness his purchase from Naomi of all that was Elimelech’s and the two sons. Boaz then stated publicly that he was taking Ruth to be his wife.

HAPPY PARENTS

There was much joy at this, and all the villagers wished them God’s blessing and many children! So Boaz and Ruth got married together as husband and wife, and in due course, Ruth gave birth to a son and called his name “Obed.” This brought great joy to Naomi in her old age, knowing that her family name would now continue. However, this is not simply a “they-got-married-and-lived-happily-ever-afterwards” story. There is much more to it than that, which is why the Book of Ruth is so important to us today.

Firstly, the Book of Ruth reveals how the potential break in the Messianic lineage from Abraham to Christ (caused by the deaths of Elimelech and his two sons) was bridged. This was done by the marriage of Boaz and Ruth, resulting in the birth of Obed who later married and became the father of Jesse. He in turn, became the father of King David, who was the legal ancestor of Jesus Christ - Israel’s Messiah and our Saviour - through Joseph the husband of Mary (Jesus’ mother). The complete lineage is found in Matthew 1 and verses 3 to 6 of that passage are also recorded in Ruth 4:18-22.

Secondly, this book presents us with the ‘type’ and requirements of a ‘Kinsman Redeemer.’ It was Boaz’s blood relationship which gave him the right to redeem. Similarly, if God was to redeem humans, then He had to enter this world and pay a price! How He did this was through the person of our Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:14), who became human (while still being God). As the Key Verse shows, our Lord then went to the cross as a perfect man and there shed His life’s precious-blood, which was the price of our redemption (not with silver or gold as in the case of Boaz). We who have trusted in Christ as our ‘Kinsman Redeemer’ receive the privilege of entering God’s family, just as Ruth through marriage became part of the family of Boaz - the Godly line of our Saviour! See also Galatians 4:4-7 and Romans 8:15-17.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1 .Why did Boaz go to the gate of the town?	.....
2. Why did the closer relative withdraw his offer?	.....
3. What effect did this have on Boaz’s plan?	.....
4. How was the potential break in the Messianic lineage bridged?	.....
5. What was our Lord able to do by becoming a man?	.....