



Church of God Sunday School

THE STORY OF RUTH

Ruth 1:1 — 4:22

This story happened in the days of the Judges, when a famine came on the land of Judah. Elimelech (*ih-LIM-uh-lek*), a man who lived in Bethlehem, took his family to Moab, to escape the famine. Moab was a heathen country—the people did not worship the God of Heaven.

Elimelech was risking the possibility of losing his family to worship of idols by moving to a heathen country. Nevertheless, he packed up his family—Naomi, his wife, and their sons, Mahlon (*MUH-lun*) and Chilion (*KIL-ee-uhn*)—and went into the land of Moab. They lived there for some time, with idolatry all around them. Then Elimelech died, and Naomi was left with only her two sons.

Mahlon and Chilion married Moabite women. One was Orpah (*OR-puh*), and the other was Ruth. After ten years, both Mahlon and Chilion died.

After their deaths, Naomi decided to return to her own land. She had heard that the terrible famine was over, for "the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread." Naomi and her daughters-in-law began the journey. "And they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah." Sometime on that journey, Naomi told Orpah and Ruth to return to their own people. She kissed them goodbye and blessed them, but they wanted to go with her. They cried, saying, "Surely we will return with thee unto thy people."

Naomi felt that God had set His hand against her. She urged Ruth and Orpah to return to their own families. Where would they find husbands? Naomi had no more sons, and her Moabite daughters-in-law might have difficulty finding husbands in Judah. Finally, Orpah kissed Naomi and went back to her own people, back to the life of idolatry.

But Ruth would not leave. She clung to Naomi. No doubt, Ruth had watched her mother-in-law down through the years. She loved her. She must have learned of the one true God while living with Naomi and her family.

Ruth said to Naomi, "Intreat me not to

leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither [where] thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me." Naomi saw that she could not change Ruth's mind. Together they set out for Bethlehem.

When they came to the city of Bethlehem, Naomi's friends were glad to see her. They noticed, though, how changed she was. She said: "Call me not Naomi [pleasant], call me Mara [bitter]: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty."

When Naomi and Ruth returned to Bethlehem, it was the time of the barley harvest. The custom was that any grain which fell to the ground during the harvest was to be left on the ground for the poor people to glean, or gather. Ruth and Naomi were poor and needed food. Ruth asked Naomi for permission to go to someone's field and glean grain.

She went out, no doubt praying that God would guide her. When she found a field that looked good to her, she began to glean with the other reapers. Ruth did not know it, but she had come to a field belonging to a kind man named Boaz (*BOH-az*). He was a very rich relative of Elimelech's.

As Ruth was gathering grain, Boaz came into the field and saw her. He asked his servant who she was. The servant told Boaz she was the Moabite woman who had come home with Naomi. Boaz had heard all Ruth had done for Naomi since the death of Ruth's husband. He had heard how Ruth had left her land and moved to live among people who were strangers to her. Boaz told Ruth to stay and glean in his field. Ruth "fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground." She wondered why Boaz was so kind to her, "seeing I am a stranger."

At mealtime, Boaz invited Ruth to eat with his workers. Later, he told his reapers to let Ruth glean with them and to drop handfuls of the grain on purpose for her.





That evening Ruth came home, bringing the grain she had gathered. When Naomi learned that Ruth had been gleaning in the field of Boaz, she told Ruth of his relationship to Elimelech. Naomi was glad and thankful to God for guiding Ruth. Naomi said it was good for Ruth to stay in the field of Boaz.

So Ruth gleaned grain in the field of Boaz until both the barley and the wheat had been harvested.

Naomi was concerned about Ruth's future though. She knew there was a law that said the closest kinsman to a widow should buy her dead husband's land from her, and if there were no children, he also had to marry her. Thus, he would raise up children in her dead husband's name. Naomi wondered if Boaz would fulfil that law.

Naomi had land that needed to be bought, or redeemed, and in Ruth's case, since she was a widow without children, Boaz would have to marry her, to raise children to carry on her dead husband's name.

Naomi advised Ruth to go to Boaz. Ruth went and did as Naomi had told her. Boaz received Ruth well, but he said there was one man who was a closer kinsman to them than himself. That man had the first duty and choice to buy the land from Naomi and to marry Ruth.

When Boaz met the kinsman at the city gate, the man told Boaz he could not redeem it because he was afraid it would ruin his own inheritance. So, he turned the duty over to Boaz. As "was the manner . . . to confirm" this, the kinsman took off his shoe. So Boaz bought the land from Naomi and also the right to marry Ruth.

God blessed the marriage of Boaz and Ruth. It was not long until God gave them a little son. He was named Obed (*OH-bed*). Obed became the father of Jesse and the grandfather of King David. That means, Ruth had a part in the family line of Jesus Christ (see Matthew 1:1-6).

MEMORY VERSE:

"Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."
—Ruth 1:16
