

RUTH.

Introduction.

The whole of the story is an example of the care and love of God as He carries out His plans for the world, though non-Jews are involved in this story God shows His love to any who are prepared to trust Him.

The main purpose of the book is historical, the story shows the links to the line of king David and so to the Messiah,

In [Ruth 4:21,22](#)

We see that *"Boaz begot Obed; Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David."*

The story is about a Gentile woman who married a Jew. The story refers to God many times, we can see His hand at work throughout. We see a great commitment by Ruth, a Gentile, to the True God in [Ruth 1:16](#),

"Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God."

Date

The events are set during the time of the Judges but the actual date is unknown. The story may not have been recorded until later because of the need to explain the custom of "the sandal exchange" as found in [Ruth 4:7-10](#), this act seems to indicate that a persons right to something, like property, was being given up, it appears to have not been in use by the date of writing the story. King David is mentioned by the writer but not king Solomon, this suggests the record was actually written during the reign of King David.

Historical background.

The time of the Judges was a period of unrest, idolatry was common and this was affecting the spiritual attitude of the people. There was inter tribal jealousy resulting in wars. In contrast, the story of Ruth concerns the joys and sorrows of a godly family who were living in Bethlehem at the start and shows the love and grace of God at work as He carries out His plan for the world.

The Promised Land and the surrounding area often had a low rainfall, thus resulting in a shortage of crop growth and then famine.

See [Genesis 12:10](#);

[2 Samuel 21:1](#);

[1 Kings 17:1](#) for example.

Because of the famine many families moved into the surrounding nations and we are told that the "family of Elimelech" travelled to Moab. This action however asks a question, God promised to care for the Jews if they obeyed and worshipped Him, does the famine indicate that they had turned away from Him? Did they prefer to trust in their own judgement and answers to the problem or trust God to supply all their needs? The story suggests that they still connected to God in some way.

The nation of Moab were descendants of a son of Lot, which came from a relationship of Lot with one of his daughters,

[Genesis 19:36,37](#).

The Moabites, though related to the Jews, did not get on with them,

See [Numbers 22:1-8](#);

[Deuteronomy 23:3-6](#).

When David was running from Saul he did find friendship in Moab,

[1 Samuel 22:3,4](#).

They did not worship the Jehovah, the True God only, but the god Chemosh, [Numbers 21:29](#), the sacrifice of children was part of the worship, [2 Kings 3:26,27](#). Solomon built a place to worship Chemosh in Jerusalem,

[1 Kings 9:7](#);

[2 Kings 23:13](#)

The story of Ruth is a picture of the friendly relations between the owner Boaz and his reapers working for him. It also shows the Jewish land system, their laws concerning the transfer of property from one person to another under the Mosaic law and what the instructions of the law for the help of a distressed and helpless families, [Deuteronomy 24:19-22](#).

This story concerns a family from Bethlehem in Judah, the name of the man was Elimelech, his wife's name was Naomi. They had two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. "Mahlon" has the meaning of "sickly" and "Chilion" the meaning "wasting", which suggests that they may have had health problems. Because of the famine they have moved to Moab where the two sons have married two Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah. This would be an unlikely marriage but we do not find any specific condemnation of these mixed marriages, although the orthodox Jew would probably not have approved such an arrangement, especially due to the religious differences,

See [Deuteronomy 23:3-6](#).

Therefore, Ruth and Orpah, as Moabitesses wife's, would probably not be accepted in Bethlehem if they returned with the family in the future.

The Return

During the ten years of living in Moab, the husband, Elimelech, and the two sons, Mahlon and Chilion died, all that is left is the Jewish wife, Naomi and the two Moabite daughter-in-laws, Ruth and Orpah.

Naomi some how has heard that the famine is over in the Promised land, God is blessing the Jewish nation, so she decides to return to Judah. Her Moabite daughters-in-laws must have been very attached to Naomi for they wanted to leave their own nation and travel to Judah with her. The story shows of the very influential godly character of Naomi, that the Moabite daughter-in-laws were prepared to leave their own nation to enter another land, which may have been a threat to them.

Naomi thanked them for their devotion to their dead husbands but felt that it was wrong for them to leave their own nation, *"Go, return each to her mother's house. The Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me."* You can continue to live in the house of your husband, Naomi prayed that God would bless them and bless a second marriage.

A levirate marriage.

There was a marriage principle in operation at the time, the next brother or possibly a family member, a kinsman, was expected to marry a childless widow of a deceased brother. The first child was then accounted as a child of the dead brother, to carry on the family name and inherit any property of the dead brother, [Deuteronomy 25:5-10](#).

This would explain the statement by Naomi *"Are there still sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?"* verse 11-13.

Verse 13: *"No, my daughters; for it grieves me very much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me!"* Naomi thought that her problems were a punishment from God, she felt it was because they had left Judah to live in Moab, she did not realizing that it was all part of God's plan for the world's salvation.

But Ruth clung to her.

[Ruth 1:14](#).

Ruth saw something in Naomi which made her prefer to live in Judah and worship Jehovah, the God of the Jews, she was prepared to renounce all that she had been taught and held dear as a Moabite, to go and live as a "Jew", Ruth was determined to remain with Naomi whatever the future consequences held. Orpah took the advice of Naomi and returned to Moab, we know nothing further about her.

[Ruth 1:16,17](#) shows the full faith she had in the Jewish God, she was willing to put all her faith and trust in Jehovah God, so rejecting and forget her old religion.

Naomi and Ruth arrive in Bethlehem.

[Ruth 1:19-22](#)

"Now they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest." Their arrival must have caused a great stir, Naomi left happy with a husband and two sons and returns with only a Moabitess daughter in law. "Is this Naomi?" v20. "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me." "Naomi" has the meaning of "Pleasant" while "Mira" means "Bitter." She feels that her time in Moab has only produced sadness. Naomi has realized that life is controlled by God, and by His actions she is now suffering, it is He who has made her sad and full of grief, *"the Lord has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?"* Yet in all her sadness she knows it is by the action of God that she is home in Bethlehem, *"the Lord has brought me home again."*

The fields of Boaz.

[Ruth 2:1-23.](#)

There was now no famine, the harvest was about to be brought in, the fields were full but Naomi had no food to harvest.

Under the Jewish Law God had given instruction for the care of those who were unable to look after themselves, due to health or their situation problems, as with Naomi and Ruth.

[Leviticus 19:9;](#)

[Leviticus 23:22;](#)

[Deuteronomy 24:19-22](#)

These gave the instructions to leave a small part of any harvest "for the poor and for the stranger," the reapers were told not to pick up any of the fruit or corn which they had dropped, neither were they to harvest right into the edge of the field, to leave a small area for the gleaner's to harvest.

Ruth asks Naomi if she can "glean heads of grain (barley)," As she worked her way through the fields she happened to arrive in a field owned by Boaz, who was a relative of Naomi. Boaz, on seeing her, wants to know who this strange woman was, her manner of dress may have been different to a local Jewish woman. The answer he received showed little respect for her, "that foreign Moabite who returned with Naomi from Moab!" Having asked permission to glean, the people had noted that she has worked very hard, spending only a short time in rest.

Boaz approaches Ruth *"listen, do not go to glean in another field, "but stay close by my young women."* The young women were employed to follow those cutting the corn to tie it up into bundles or sheaves. This would provide her with first access to any dropped corn and this action is suggesting that he wants to take care of her. She was also told to use any facilities provided for the workers of Boaz, water and protection etc.

Verse 10: This shows humility by Ruth over this action. Boaz had already made enquiries about Naomi on her return and has heard of how Ruth had cared for Naomi and her sacrifice in leaving her own family to do it. Boaz knows that only the Lord can fully repay her for this sacrifice, and her faith in the Lord, verse 12. Ruth is very grateful for this kindness, she has realized the problems of being a Moabite stranger and feels unworthy of the acts of kindness, possibly because of being a non-Jew, a Gentile, and her heathen, background.

When the workers stopped for a meal, verse 14, Boaz invited Ruth to take her place with them, Boaz made sure that she was well fed.

Boaz now instructs his workers to go out of their way to provide grain for her to glean, normally only the gleaners were allowed to take any grain dropped, but the workers were instructed to deliberately leave grain for her to collect without her knowing,

"let grain from the bundles fall purposely for her; leave it that she may glean, and do not rebuke her.",verse 16

Ruth, as a gleaner had a legal right to collect any grain left behind, the reapers made sure she had plenty for her to collect.

Verse 17: At the end of the day she separated the grain from the seed heads, the chaff, she would do this by beating the grain heads with a stick, then collecting the seeds. *"it was about an ephah of barley,"* this would be sufficient to feed Ruth and Naomi for about five days. Ruth then gave Naomi the food she had saved from her meal in the fields.

Naomi was surprised on how much she had been able to collect, and asked "where did she glean?" "The fields of Boaz." Boaz was a wealthy landowner and a close relative to Naomi. In this position it would have expected to buy any land which had been owned by the Elimelech family and help support them, [Leviticus 25:25-28.](#)

Verse 20: Naomi gives praise to the Lord, He has made Boaz care for the dead Mahlon and his living widow. Naomi realized the significant's and instructs Ruth, *"It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his young women,"* accept his help and generosity until the end of the harvest, so Ruth did as instructed.

Ruth finds a Redeemer.

[Ruth 3:1-16.](#)

Naomi has realized that she is the only family that Ruth has, all her relations being back in Moab. Naomi therefore is thinking of the future for Ruth with her words, *"My daughter, shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you?"* The word "security" is indicating that she would like to "arrange a marriage" for Ruth.

Naomi is now considering the "levirate marriage custom." Naomi said "Boaz, is he not our relative?" Naomi feels that she should approach Boaz. Naomi then instructs Ruth, *"he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor."* (He was taking the advantage of a breeze during the night to allow him to winnow. The newly separated grain is thrown into the air, the wind will blow away the lighter chaff, the unwanted outer covering on a seed, and leave the seed ready for grinding into flour.)

Naomi tells Ruth to go to the place they were threshing. Boaz had made no indication that he would be interested in marriage so Naomi and Ruth must be careful in their actions, not to cause Boaz any problems.

Ruth, when he goes to sleep *"you shall go in, uncover his feet, and lie down at his feet."* This could be considered as an immoral action by some but Naomi felt free to suggest it due to the circumstances. During the night something wakes Boaz, it is dark and he finds a "strange woman" at his feet, "Who are you?" *"I am Ruth, your handmaid: spread your cloak over your handmaid; for you have the right of redemption."* This custom was a traditional way of indicating a desire to marry the woman.

Boaz praised Ruth for her behaviour, not seeking the company of men of her own age or money,

"do not fear. I will do for you all that you request, for all the people of my town know that you are a virtuous woman. (this has the meaning of "a woman of worth")"

Boaz continues *"There is a relative closer than I. If he does not want to perform the duty for you, then I will perform the duty for you,"* He instructs Ruth to remain for the rest of the night, then sends a gift of barley home to Naomi as thanks for her action. Boaz was also concerned that others might think bad of Ruth's action, so he said, *"Do not let it be known that the woman came to the threshing floor, no wrong was done."*

Boaz marries Ruth.

[Ruth 4:1-17.](#)

Boaz first has to make sure that no other kinsmen are interested in carrying out the "levirate marriage custom", Boaz sits down in the gate of the city, he calls the other close relative to sit with him, then calls ten men of elders of the city to act as witnesses. It was the concern of the community that each family is prevented from extinction, this was why the situation of Naomi and Ruth has become of interest to the people of the area.

It appears that Naomi has offered a piece of land owned by her family for sale, Boaz points out to the other kinsman of the fact and that *"if you will redeem it, redeem it; but if you will not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know; for there is no one but you to redeem it, and I am next after you."* The other kinsman said, *"I will redeem it."* he has assumed that only Naomi is the owner. Then Boaz pointed out that *"you must also buy it from Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to perpetuate the name of the dead through his inheritance."*

Both the isolation of land and loss of the family name were to be prevented under their law. The land would never be the property of the buyer himself, he would have to hold it in trust for the son of Ruth, who would take on the name of Mahlon, the first husband. The close relative said, *"I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I ruin my own inheritance."* He would have to spend money on a piece of land that he would never own, plus he may have been already married, though apparently this would not take away the obligation of being a redeemer.

"Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging," This comment suggests that when the book of Ruth was written this custom was not in normal use. Taking off a shoe and passing it on was the custom way of announcing that he had no further legal interest in the matter.

Boaz now publicly purchases all the property owned by Elimelech, Chilion and Mahlon, from the hand of Naomi. Then takes Ruth as his wife, *"to perpetuate the name of the dead through his inheritance."* The people pray that Boaz will be blessed by his action like Rachel and Leah, the wives of Jacob. "Ephrathah" is the name given to the region in which Bethlehem was located.

Boaz and Ruth had a son, Naomi now has a 'son' to carry the family name on. The text seems to suggest that Naomi "became a nurse to him," this could be indicating an act of adoption.

The child was called Obed, he was to become the father of Jesse, the father of David. The final verses list the previous generations, Pharez was the son of Judah, [Genesis 46:12](#); [Matthew 1:2-6](#).