

The Story of Ruth

Setting the Scene:

There are many Jewish laws that are referenced in the story of Ruth that affect the events described in the story. The first is that in the law, at harvest time, the poor and the foreign were allowed to follow reapers in the field and pick up any stray pieces of wheat, barley, grapes, etc. that were left by the reapers. This was called gleaning. (Lev 19:9) The LORD wanted to make sure everyone was provided for.

Another of the important laws was that if a man dies, leaving his wife childless; then it is the duty of the brother or next of kin to marry her and give her a child for her dead husband's name so that his line and inheritance won't die. This was called redeeming, whether for the woman or the inheritance. This was done for the love of the dead relative. If the brother or next of kin didn't do this then he was treated with shame. He was made to take his shoe off to show that he had no rights to the wife or inheritance of the dead kin and he was called the "house of him who had his shoe loosed" to show that he would not help his family. (Deut 25:5-10) Giving the shoe to another was a sign of transferring that right to another.

The Story:

Long ago when Israel was ruled by Judges instead of kings, there lived a man named Elimelech with his wife, Naomi; and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. There was a famine in the lands and Elimelech moved with his family from Bethlehem to Moab and stayed in the fields there. After Elimelech died, his sons took wives from the women of Moab, Ruth and Orpah. They lived there ten more years; but Naomi's sons died too.



One day, Naomi heard that the LORD had provided bread to the people of Israel so she decided to travel back to her homeland. Naomi started to leave with her daughters-in-law but turned and told each to go back to her mother's house; wishing that the LORD deal with them kindly as they have been with her. The women wept and told Naomi that they would rather go with Naomi; but Naomi thought that they would do better back in Moab. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law and left to go back to her family's house and back to her gods; but Ruth hugged Naomi and wouldn't let go.

"Where you go; I will go." Ruth told her. "Where you stay; I will stay. Your people will be my people; and your God will be mine too." So Naomi and Ruth stayed together and came to Bethlehem.



After they reached Bethlehem, Ruth told Naomi that she would go and try to find a field where she would be welcome to gather up some grains of corn after the reapers. So she went. As she gathered, Ruth came to a field owned by a man named Boaz, and she asked to gather there.

Boaz was visiting his field at the time and asked his servant, who was set over the reapers, who she was. The servant explained that she was the girl from Moab who arrived in Bethlehem with Naomi. Moved by how Ruth had helped Naomi, Boaz called to her and told her to feel free to stay and gather up after the reapers and not to feel that she had to go elsewhere. He told her to stay close to the other girls and he would make sure that no one would bother her.

Ruth was so grateful that she fell on her face and asked: “Why are you being so kind to me since I am a foreigner.”

“Because,” Boaz replied, “I have heard of all you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband; even leaving your family and homeland to come to a people you never knew before now. May Jehovah repay you for your work and may you be rewarded by Jehovah, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to trust.”

“I hope to find favor in your sight,” Ruth told him. “You have given me comfort and spoken to me so kindly as though I were not a stranger.”



Boaz invited her to eat at mealtime next to his reapers and that she could gather more afterward. Boaz made sure to secretly command his reapers to be kind to her and purposely drop extra handfuls that she could gather.

In the evening, Ruth went back to Naomi and showed Naomi everything she had gained.

“Where did you gather these?” Naomi asked happily. “Blessed is the man who showed you this kindness.”

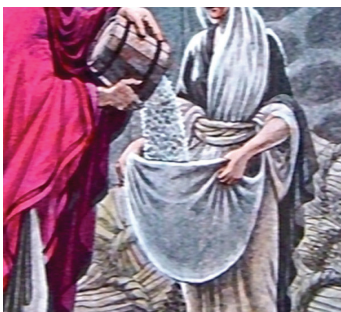
Ruth explained to Naomi that it was from a field belonging to a man named Boaz and that he had been kind to her.

Naomi was full of joy. “Blessed is he of the LORD who has not left off his kindness to the living and the dead.” Naomi explained that Boaz was next of kin to her husband. She told Ruth to do as he had instructed and not go to any other field. And Ruth did just as she was told throughout the barley and wheat harvest.

One day, Naomi took her daughter-in-law aside and told her that Boaz would be winnowing barley tonight. She explained that he would eat and drink afterward; and that Ruth should wash, anoint herself and get dressed; then, after Boaz laid down, Ruth should lay at his feet and that Boaz would help her.

Once Boaz finished his work, Boaz settled down to eat and drink and when he was satisfied he laid down. At midnight he awoke startled and found a woman at his feet. “Who are you?” Boaz asked.

“I am Ruth, your servant” she said. “Please help me since you are a near kinsman.”



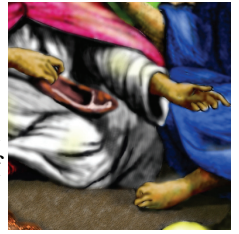
“May God bless you for all your kindness,” Boaz said to her. “I will help you, but I am not your nearest kinsmen. There is another who is nearer. In the morning I will ask if he wishes to redeem you. If he does not; then I will.” Before she left he told her not to tell anyone else that she had been there. Then he gave her a load of Barley so she wouldn’t go home empty handed to Naomi.

Ruth left and gave Naomi the barley, telling Naomi how Boaz would help. Naomi took the barley and told Ruth to rest, knowing that Boaz would not sleep until he had done what he said he would.

At the city gates, Boaz called for ten of the elders and the nearest kin to Naomi and explained to Naomi's nearest kin that Naomi had a parcel of land in Moab from her husband, their family member, Elimelech. He was welcome to redeem it but would also have to redeem the wife of Naomi's son who was dead so the line would not die. If he could not then Boaz would.

The kinsman said: "I can't redeem it because it might ruin my own inheritance. You redeem the right that I cannot." And he took off his shoe in front of the elders and gave it to Boaz.

Boaz turned to the elders and people and said: "You are witnesses this day that I have bought all that was Elimelech's and Chilion's and Mahlon's from the hand of Naomi. And Ruth, the wife of Mahlon, to raise up the name of the dead so it would not be cut off among his brothers."



And those at the gate asked a blessing on Boaz that his wife be like Leah and Rachel who bore the sons that built Israel.

So Boaz married Ruth and she bore a son. And the child was called Obed; the father of Jesse; the father of David, a king of Israel, a man after God's own heart.

