

Ruth, the Loving Daughter-in-Law

by
Joelee Chamberlain

I've told you a lot of true stories from the Bible haven't I? Do you remember what the time after Moses led the Jews out of Egypt but before they got a man for a king is called? Yes, it is called the time of the judges. Another time I told you a very long story with lots of the stories all together about those judges, didn't I? Do you remember who some of those judges were? That's right, there were Ehud and Deborah and Samson and Gideon, all judges of the Jews, the children of Israel.

Well, the Bible also gives us the story of just one family who lived during the time of the judges. I told you about this family before, but I've had some people ask me to tell it again all by itself and with some more details. Would you like that? All right.

This story is told in the book of Ruth which is a tiny book of the Bible that comes right after the book of Judges. The true story told in the book of Ruth is the story of just one family who was living during the time when the book of Judges was happening. So let's talk about the book of Ruth today.

All right, then. This story starts in the promised land of Canaan, the land that later is called the land of Israel.

Now, in the land of Israel there was a certain family from the tribe of Judah. This family lived in a city called Beth-le-hem. There was the husband whose name was El-im-e-lech, and Elimelech's wife Na-o-mi, and there were their two sons whose names were Mah-lon and Chil-i-on. Well, a famine came to where they lived. (A famine is when there isn't enough food.) So Elimelech and Naomi and their sons moved over across the Jordan River to the country of Moab where there wasn't any famine.

After a while, though, Elimelech, the husband died, and poor Naomi was left with just her two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. Well, Mahlon and Chilion each married a Moabite woman. One wife was named Orpah and the other wife was named Ruth. And Naomi and her family lived in Moab for ten years.

But then both Mahlon and Chilion died, and now that left poor Naomi with just her sons' wives, that is, her two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth.

Well, about that time Naomi heard that the famine was gone from her old home in Israel, so she decided to go back home to Bethlehem in the land of Judah in Israel. So she set out to go back to her old home. And Orpah and Ruth started out with her, but she said to them, "No, you just go back to your own families, and may the Lord be good to you, just as you have been good to me and my family."

And Naomi said to Orpah and Ruth, "And may the Lord give you new husbands."

And then Naomi kissed her daughters-in-law, and they all started crying. And Orpah and Ruth said to Naomi, "Oh, but we will go back with you to your people."

But Naomi said to them, "Go back, my daughters. Why should you go with me? I don't have any other sons for you to have as husbands. No, my daughters. I am unhappy for you."

So after Naomi talked to them, they all cried together again, and Orpah kissed Naomi and went back to her own family.

But Ruth just hung onto Naomi. So Naomi said, "Look, Orpah has gone back to her people, you go with her."

But Ruth said, "No, don't ask me to leave you or not to follow you. I will go anywhere you go and stay with you. Your people will be my people, and I will worship your God. I won't leave you until we die."

So when Naomi saw that Ruth would not change her mind, Naomi stopped telling her to go back, and Ruth went with Naomi. And they traveled until they got back to Naomi's home in Bethlehem in the land of Israel.

When Naomi and Ruth finally got to Bethlehem, the people in Bethlehem were sorry for Naomi when they saw her. After all, when she'd left, she'd had a husband and two sons. But they were dead now.

Now, it was spring time when Naomi and Ruth got to Bethlehem, and it was the beginning of the time when the people were harvesting, cutting down, barley. Barley is a grain that is used in cooking.

Well, Naomi and Ruth were poor and didn't have any barley fields to harvest, so Ruth said to her mother-in-law, "Let me go out to the barley fields and glean in a field where the owner will let me."

But what is gleaning? It means to go through the fields or vineyards at harvest time and pick up any grain or grapes that the reapers (the workers in the fields or vineyards) might have dropped or overlooked. Ruth would have to bend over and pick up grain all day, so it would be hard work, wouldn't it? But she wanted to help Naomi and herself.

And gleaning is the way that the Lord had made for poor people to get food. You see, in His law God had told the Jews that when they were reaping grain (cutting the stalks of grain down), they weren't to pick up any grain that they may have dropped. Also, when it came time to harvest their grapes, they were not to pick all of their grapes. They were to leave some for the poor to get. This way the poor people also could work and get food. Wasn't that a kind law God had made? So that is what Ruth is asking Naomi if she may do, go gleaning.

Then Naomi said to Ruth, "Yes, daughter, you may go and do that."

So Ruth went out and came to a field worked and worked gleaning, picking up stalks of grain that had dropped on the ground. And the owner of this field was named Boaz. Now Ruth didn't know it, but Boaz was a relative of Elimelech, Naomi's dead husband.

Well, Boaz came out and saw Ruth and asked someone who she was. When Boaz found out that she was Naomi's daughter-in-law, Boaz said to Ruth, "Listen to me. Don't go gleaning in another field. You stay here in my fields with my young women. You watch where they are reaping and do all of your gleaning here. You will be safe here. And when you're thirsty, drink the water that has been taken from the well."

Then Ruth bowed before Boaz and asked him, "Why are you so good to me? I'm a stranger." (She meant that she wasn't a Jew.)

But Boaz told Ruth, "I've heard about you and how good you are to Naomi, your mother-in-law since her husband died. And I've heard that you left your mother and father and your own land and have come here to a place that you didn't know anything about. The Lord will bless you for all of this."

Then Ruth thanked Boaz for being so kind to her, even though she wasn't a Jew like he was.

And Boaz said to Ruth, "And when it's time to eat, you go ahead and have your meal here with my workers."

So when lunch time came, Ruth ate with the workers. And Boaz gave her the same food that he and his workers were eating. They didn't have fancy food, but it filled her up. In fact, there was more food than she could eat, so she tucked some away to take home to Naomi.

When Ruth was through eating and had gotten up to go back to glean some more, Boaz told his workers, "You drop some of the grain on purpose so that she will have more to glean. And don't bother her at all. Let her glean wherever she wants to."

Well, Ruth had gleaned all morning. And then after eating she gleaned all the rest of the day. At the end of the day Ruth threshed out the stalks of grain she had gleaned. You remember what threshing is, don't you? That's where you take the stalks of the plants and hit them and hit them until all the little grains, the seeds, all fall out. So Ruth threshed all of the grain she had gleaned, and she got a great big bag of grain seeds.

When Ruth took home to Naomi all of the grain she had gleaned and threshed out and then gave Naomi the extra food from lunch, Naomi was surprised and asked Ruth, "Whose field did you glean in?"

Ruth said, "In the field of a man named Boaz."

Then Naomi said, "Oh, how good the Lord is to us! Boaz is a relative of my dead husband! You must only glean in his fields."

So that's what Ruth did. She gleaned in Boaz' field with his young women servants all during the barley harvest and all during the wheat harvest.

Now, the Jews had a law that if a man died and his wife had no children to take care of her, then one of the man's close relatives should marry that woman and take care of her and have children by her. And this close relative would also buy any land the dead man had owned. And when the close relative died, the land would go to those children.

Well, later Naomi had Ruth remind Boaz of this law. That means that Ruth sort of asked Boaz to marry her. And Boaz said to Ruth, "Don't worry. I'll take care of things. Everyone in the city knows what a very good woman you are."

Then Boaz told Ruth, "Yes, I am a close relative, but I'm not the closest relative. In the morning I'll talk to this other relative, and if he won't marry you, I will." And then Boaz gave Ruth a whole bunch of barley that was already threshed out to take back to Naomi.

Then Ruth went back home to Naomi and gave her the barley and told Naomi what Boaz had said to her. Naomi said, "Just wait now, my daughter. He will do today what he said he'd do."

So Boaz went to the gate of the city and sat and waited until he saw the closest relative walking by, and he said, "Hello there! Come over here and sit down." And the man went over to Boaz and sat down. Then Boaz got 10 of the leaders of the city together and asked them to sit down, too. And they did.

Then Boaz said to the closest relative, "You know that Naomi has come back from Moab. She is selling a piece of land that had belonged to her husband Elimelech."

Boaz said, "I thought I should tell you about it. We have leaders here to hear what we agree to do. If you want to buy the land, go ahead and buy it. But if you don't want to buy it, then let me know, and I'll buy it."

The other man said, "Yes, I'll buy it."

But then Boaz said, "Well, the day that you buy the land from Naomi, you also have to marry her daughter-in-law Ruth who is from Moab and have children by her."

Well, the other man didn't like that idea. He said, "No, I don't want to do that. I already have children of my own. I want them to get everything I have when I die. So you go ahead and buy the land and marry Ruth yourself."

So that's what they agreed to do. Now, when we agree on something like buying land, we sign

some papers to show we really mean to do it. But the Jews then had a different way of making an agreement. I think it's a funny way, so I'm going to tell you about it and what the other man did! The other man took off one of his sandals and gave it to Boaz! That means he'd have to walk home with only one sandal on! But that would make it so that everyone who saw it would remember that an agreement had been made and what the agreement was, wouldn't it?

Well, it sounds like other people had gathered around to see what was going on, so Boaz said to the leaders who were there and the other people, "You've seen what we've agreed to do. I will buy from Naomi every thing that belonged to her husband Elimelech and everything that belonged to their sons Chilion and Mahlon. And I will marry Ruth who had been married to Mahlon and have children by her. And when I die, the land will go to them. You've all heard this."

And everyone there said, "Yes, we've heard this. May the Lord bless you and give you and Ruth lots of children."

So Boaz and Ruth got married, and they lived in Bethlehem.

Now, I'm going to tell you something really interesting. Do you remember back in the book of Joshua where we talked about Rahab, the woman who had hidden the two Jewish spies in Jericho? Well, Rahab was Boaz's mother!!!! Aren't you surprised??

And I'll tell you something else really interesting. After a while Boaz and Ruth had a baby boy and named him Obed. Well, that Obed grew up and had a baby boy named Jesse, and Jesse grew up and had a baby boy and who do you think Jesse's baby boy, was? Why he was David!! Yes, he was the same David who would later kill Goliath and become the great king of the Jews!!!! So Rahab was the mother of Boaz. Boaz married Ruth and they became the great-grandparents of David. And who do you think they all became the ancestors of many, many years later, over 1000 years later? Jesus!!!! Yes, Rahab, Boaz, Ruth, and David were great-great-great-grandparents of the Lord Jesus, our Saviour!! And do you want to know something else?! Jesus was born many, many years later in that very same town of Bethlehem where Naomi and Boaz and Ruth had lived! And that town of Bethlehem is still over there today! I think that's all very interesting, don't you?

But let's talk just a little more about Naomi. Well, now that Boaz and Ruth were married and had their baby boy, Naomi was very happy. And Naomi got to help take care little Obed. So even though this story started out being sad, with Naomi's husband and sons dying, it ends up happily with Naomi living with Ruth who loved Naomi very much and with Boaz and with baby Obed. God was very good to Naomi, wasn't He?

And the Lord was also very good to Naomi's daughter-in-law Ruth, too, wasn't He? Yes, loyal, loving Ruth became the wife of an important man and became the great-grandmother of King David and then much later the great-great-great-grandmother of Jesus.

And, of course, Jesus is the most important name in this whole story, isn't He? Yes, His name makes us remember that God the Father loves us so much that He had God the Son (who is Jesus) come to earth to make a way for us to be able to go to heaven some day. And how did Jesus do that?

That's right, by dying on the cross for our sins. Then 3 days later Jesus was alive again, and He's still alive in heaven. And if we realize that we are sinners and ask Jesus to forgive our sins, He will. Then someday we can go be with the Lord Jesus forever and ever.

Did you enjoy this story about a family that lived during the time of the judges of Israel -- the story of Ruth, the great-great-great-grandmother of Jesus? I hope so.