

## **Lessons from the book of Ruth**

### **Famine in “The House of Bread”**

Critics of the Christian faith have often pointed to the brutal reality of living in this world as evidence that: (a) God does not exist, or (b) He is powerless to intervene when bad things happen, or (c) He doesn't care when we hurt. Many of the stories of the Bible, however, provide abundant evidence that none of these assumptions are correct. True, God is allowing the human race to reap the consequences of rebellion against Him. But without violating our free will, He is always present, always working in human history, always moving us toward the ultimate resolution of the problems of sin and suffering. The story of Ruth provides one such example.

Ruth 1:1-5. What were the hardships that fell on Naomi and Ruth, and what caused them? How does this reflect the situation that the entire human race now faces?

There is irony to be found in the opening statement of this story: there was a famine that affected Bethlehem, a town whose name means “house of bread.” One is reminded of the abundance of Eden, where God told Adam and Eve, “ ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat’ ” (Gen. 2:16). The human race began its existence in abundance, under the care of a generous Creator, but then exchanged its role as caretakers of creation for the slavery of sin. “ ‘In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground,’ ” God told Adam (Gen. 3:19).

Like Naomi, we have been dispossessed from the inheritance that God originally planned for us to have, and our lives have become a hardship. Eden was given as a gift, but not unconditionally: humans were free to rebel, but that would mean they would have to take responsibility for their own well-being. Originally, we were meant to “subdue” the whole unfallen world under God's blessing, but now we are faced with the task of subduing a fallen one. Selfish human beings competing for scarce resources leads to much heartache and suffering.

The tragedy is unspeakable: the earth still produces abundantly, a powerful testimony to God's love. But between human greed and the ravages of sin, the world at times seems to subdue us more than we subdue it. One day, however, all this will end.

Even after six thousand years of sin and death, how does the earth still reveal the wonders of God's love and creative power?

The book of Ruth offers lessons on divine Providence, the power of selfless love and loyalty, the importance of character and integrity in a challenging world, God's ability to use unlikely individuals for His purposes, and how God weaves seemingly mundane events into His grand plan of redemption, ultimately pointing to Jesus.

### **Ruth and Boaz**

Naomi asked that her name be changed to Mara, because of the bitterness that had fallen over her life (see Ruth 1:20). Our relationship with our Creator has been irreparably damaged by sin, forcing us into spiritual poverty. Our prospects are dim, and we spend our lives gleaning what we can from the edges of the field, living on the scraps of joy that can still be found in a broken world. But it all changes the moment we make a remarkable discovery: God has not forgotten us.

Ruth 2:5-20. Why is this such a pivotal moment in the story? Why do you think Naomi's discovery of the benefactor's identity was such good news?

Naomi could not take possession of her husband Elimelech's land without obtaining assistance from her husband's family. She hopes that Ruth can marry a close relative of her deceased husband and bear a child in Elimelech's name. God has made provision in Israel for individuals to reclaim their inheritance in the Promised Land: a close relative was needed to redeem Elimelech's inheritance. Boaz was not just a kind farmer; he was a kinsman of Elimelech who could redeem the land.

The discovery that Boaz was not only kind-hearted and generous but a relative was the best possible news: the poverty in which these two women existed did not have to last forever.

Christians have long understood Boaz to be a type of Christ, who is not only our Creator, but chose to become our kinsman a real, flesh-and-blood human being, one of the reasons why over and over He called Himself "the Son of man" (Matt. 12:8, Mark 8:31, Luke 22:22, John 3:14).

Far too many people think of God in harsh terms: perhaps He will let us into heaven if we check all the correct boxes on a moral inventory, but He will do so grudgingly because we have scraped by on a technicality. The picture of Christ revealed in Boaz completely displaces such notions. God not only notices us; in spite of our deep spiritual poverty, He wants us as His bride.

Try to wrap your mind around not only the Creator's becoming part of His own creation but then dying for it. How should this astonishing truth impact how we view our own existence?

### **Boaz, as Redeemer**

Boaz falls deeply in love with Ruth and wishes to marry her, but there is a significant barrier: there is a closer relative who also has a claim on the woman and the land. If we consider Boaz to be a type of Christ, this situation may reveal an issue at stake in the great controversy. Christ loves us, but there is a "closer relative" who also has a claim: Satan.

What do the following passages reveal about Satan's claim on humanity? (Job 1:6-11; Matt. 4:8-9; Jude 9; Luke 22:31).

When Satan appeared in the heavenly council, he told God that he had been " 'going to and fro in the earth' " (Job 1:7), and when God asked him if he had noticed the righteous Job, Satan laid claim to him as one of his own, suggesting that Job's heart did not really belong to God. That is, he really follows You only because You are good to him. Stop being good to him and see who truly has Job's allegiance.

In Jude, we see a brief reference to a story that was well known in Israel: after Moses had been buried by God (Deut. 34:6), he was later resurrected. Though we are not privy to the details, the text itself, which says that they disputed over the body of Moses, implies that Satan was making some kind of claim on it. "For the first time Christ was about to give life to the dead. As the Prince of life and the shining ones approached the grave, Satan was alarmed for his supremacy. With his evil angels he stood to dispute an invasion of the territory that he claimed as his own. He boasted that the servant of God had become his prisoner. He declared that even Moses was not able to keep the law of God; that he had

taken to himself the glory due to Jehovah—the very sin which had caused Satan’s banishment from heaven—and by transgression had come under the dominion of Satan.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 478. Obviously, Christ refuted Satan’s claim, and Moses was resurrected (see Matt. 17:3).

In Ruth 4:1-12, Boaz travels to the gate of Bethlehem—the town, where Christ entered our world as our close relative. The elders gather, and finally a sandal (a symbol of ownership) is exchanged.

The gate of a village is where cases were decided: this is a type of judgment scene. It reflects the judgment scene of Daniel 7:13-14, 22, 26, 27. We must not miss this critical aspect of judgment: judgment is in “favor of the saints” but only because Christ paid the price for us, just as Boaz did for his bride.

### **1. God's Providence in Adversity**

Even in times of loss and devastation, such as Naomi’s and Ruth’s widowhood and poverty, God is still working to fulfill His plan.

God can turn a situation from “worse to good” and restore people from their lowest point, showing that He does not waste any experience in our lives.

### **2. The Power of Unconditional Love and Loyalty**

Ruth’s steadfast commitment to Naomi and her God, despite being given permission to return to her own people, is a powerful example of selfless love and loyalty.

Her choice to follow the God of Israel and journey with Naomi demonstrates a profound, self-sacrificing devotion, reflecting the love of Christ.

### **3. Integrity and Character in a Fallen World**

Ruth lived a life of incredible character and integrity, even in the midst of poverty and hardship.

Her actions demonstrate that true character is revealed in our private moments and that living a simple life of virtue can have profound and lasting impact.

### **4. God's Use of Unlikely Individuals**

The story highlights God’s ability to use the most unexpected and unlikely people to accomplish His divine purpose.

Ruth, a foreigner and a widow, was chosen for the lineage of Jesus, a testament to God’s ability to elevate the humble and to see His plan unfold through all people.

### **5. God's Larger Plan of Redemption**

The book shows how individual lives and events—such as a famine, a move to Moab, and a chance encounter—are woven together into God’s larger narrative of redemption for the whole world.

The genealogy at the end of the book, connecting Ruth and Boaz to King David and ultimately to Jesus, reveals that even seemingly small, mundane events are part of God’s grand, redemptive plan.