

Ruth –

Hello, my name is Ruth, and I lived in Bible times. I was a nobody, but God made me a somebody so that He could display His glory through me. I suspect you have read my story in the book of Ruth in the Bible. Stop and think, have you ever considered all of the ways in which the hand of God manipulated the circumstances that would ultimately bring Boaz and me together so that we could bear a son in the line of Christ? I am in heaven now, and I can clearly see all of the ways in which He worked. The book of Ruth is primarily about me, so let me tell you about some of the things that happened to and for me while I was still on earth.

I was born a citizen of Moab. My parents taught me integrity and hard work, but they also taught me to worship their false gods. If the story I am about to share with you had not happened, I would have died worshipping those imitation gods and ended up in hell. Oh, but praise God, I came to believe in Jehovah, the one true God, and I praise Him for that.

The Move

^{1:1} My story took place when judges ruled in Israel. During that period of time God caused a great famine to overtake Israel. (If God had not brought the famine, there would have been no story about me.) Life was hard in Israel, and food was scarce. So, a Jewish man named Elimelech decided to take his family and move to where food was readily available. Of all things, he chose to settle in Moab. (Unsaved people would say that it was just luck that he chose to settle in the same town where I lived. Oh, but we who know the Lord can clearly see how the Lord led the man to my country, to my town, and to a house close to mine so that Naomi and I could meet and become good friends. This is but one example of God's leading.)

So Elimelech, his wife, and their two sons packed up their belongings and made the move. ²⁻³ His wife's name was Naomi, and his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. All four of them were called Ephrathites because they were born and raised in Bethlehem, a region of Judah. Once they were settled, I was privileged to meet Naomi. She was the most pleasant person I had ever been around. It didn't take long for us to become good friends, and I grew to love her as my own mother. I learned sometime later that her name meant pleasant, and she was really true to her name. Unfortunately, it wasn't long before Elimelech became sick and died. That left Naomi as a widow caring for her two unmarried sons. (This was not by accident, because God knew that if Elimelech had not died, Naomi would probably never have entertained the idea of returning to Bethlehem, and I would never have met Boaz.)

⁴⁻⁵ When the boys came of age they sought wives from the women of Moab. Chilion chose a woman named Orpah, and Mahlon chose me. (If I had not become friends with their family, Mahlon quite likely would not have chosen me as his wife. If Mahlon had not married me, I would not have been part of the family when Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem. Therefore, there would have been no reason for her to take me with her.) Anyway, Mahlon and I were happily married, but I was heartbroken because God did not allow me to conceive. He didn't let Orpah conceive either. I prayed asking the Father to give me a child, but it appeared to me that His answer was "no". (Little did I know that He knew better. He knew that it was not a good idea for me to bear a son at that time, because He knew that Boaz would not have been interested in me as a wife if I had one or more kids running around town. By the time we got to Bethlehem my oldest would have been as much as nine years old.) After about ten years of marriage both Mahlon and Chilion became really sick and died. That left Naomi, Orpah, and me as widows.

⁶ Life was exceptionally hard for widows back then. One day Naomi heard that the famine was over in Israel and that God had blessed His people with an abundance of food. So, she decided to return to Bethlehem. (It was not by chance that she chose to go there. Rather, God orchestrated even that choice by ending the famine. Then too, I am reasonably sure that Naomi would not have entertained the idea of returning to Bethlehem and I would not have met Boaz if our husbands had not died. As long as one of our husbands was there to support us, we would have gotten along okay.) ⁷ Well, we packed up all of our belongings, and the three of us started our trek toward the land of Judah.

⁸ We had only gone as far as the edge of town when Naomi stopped, turned to us, and said,

“Girls, go back to your mother’s houses. I pray that the Lord will treat you as kindly as you have treated your deceased husbands and me. ⁹ I pray also that you will find new husbands and that the Lord will give you a blessed life together.”

Then Naomi kissed us, and we all cried together. ¹⁰ Both Orpah and I told her that we would not return to Moab but that we would go to Israel with her and live among her people. ¹¹⁻¹³ She wouldn’t settle for that, so she said,

“No, no! Go back. I have taught you the customs of my people, so you know that in my country you would be expected to marry a relative. I’m too old to remarry, and even if I were to bear sons, would you wait until they were grown to marry them? Would you really wait that long, or would you take a man of Israel contrary to tradition? No, go back. Life would be too hard for you there, but it will be even harder for me since God has become my adversary.”

¹⁴ So, the three of us cried together again. Then Orpah kissed Naomi and returned to Moab. Oh, but I clung to Naomi and would not let go. ¹⁵ Then Naomi tried again to get me to return. She said,

“Look, your sister has returned to Moab and to her gods. Go with her.”

Naomi confessed to be true to Jehovah, but in a time of weakness she told me to return to my previous gods. She said this because she was so depressed about how God had treated her harshly by allowing both her husband and her two sons to die. She really wanted me to return to Moab but I stood my ground. I had grown to love her with all of my heart, so I said,

¹⁶ “Whoa! You can’t get rid of me that easily. Stop trying to get me to leave you and go back to Moab. I love you. In fact, I love you so much that I have made up my mind to go wherever you go; I will live wherever you live; your people will be my people; your God will always be my God; and ¹⁷ the place where you die and are buried will be the place I will die and be buried too. May the Lord curse me if anything but death causes us to part. You’re stuck with me for life.”

¹⁸ Once Naomi saw my determination, she didn’t say any more about the matter. (Had I returned to Moab like Orpah, I would never have met Boaz.) ¹⁹ After that was settled, we

continued our journey until we came to Bethlehem. When we got there, the whole town heard about it. Soon the women of the town met us and said, “Naomi, is that you? It is so good to have you back.”²⁰ They meant well, but Naomi responded,

“Stop calling me Naomi because that name means pleasant. Call me Mara, because I am bitter about the way God has treated me so harshly. When Elimelech and I left for Moab we had plenty,²¹ but now I have come back to Bethlehem with nothing to my name except Ruth. Why then should you call me pleasant when God has taken away everything?”

²² So, Naomi and I, a foreigner from Moab, went to where Naomi had lived before moving to Moab. Then we took up residence in her old home. (It could be said that we just happened to arrive in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest. Oh, but it wasn’t by chance that we arrived at just the right time. No, God made it happen so that I could meet Boaz.)

The Meeting

^{2:1} As the Lord would have it, Elimelech had a close relative named Boaz. This is important, because he was in a position to buy back all of Naomi’s property and take me as his wife if he chose to do so. (I am convinced that if I hadn’t come to Bethlehem with Naomi, he may not have been interested in redeeming Naomi. It seems clear to me that the whole transaction was so that he could marry me).

Boaz was extremely wealthy, held a position of prominence in the city, and owned several fields of grain.² Once Naomi and I were settled in our new home, I asked her if she would allow me to go and glean grain in one of the fields of Bethlehem. I told her that I would not glean in a field unless those in authority gave me permission.³ She liked the idea so I left the house in search of a field. Well, I found one that looked good so I asked permission. I later discovered that the field belonged to Boaz. The Lord prompted Boaz to hire a kind supervisor who gladly gave me permission so I immediately started gleaning. (It could be said that it was dumb luck that I found Boaz’s field, but it is apparent that the Lord led me to precisely the right one so that I could meet Boaz.)⁴ While I was working, Boaz came to Bethlehem, and the Lord prompted him to visit that same field. When he got there, he greeted the workers with “Hello, the Lord bless you.” The workers responded with their own, “Hello, the Lord bless you, too.”⁵ When he looked up and saw me working, he asked the supervisor whose wife or daughter I was.⁶ The man said,

“She is the Moabite woman who returned from Moab with Naomi.⁷ She asked very kindly for permission to reap grain after the reapers had harvested what they wanted. Well, I told her yes, and she has been working diligently since morning. Right now she is in the house taking a break.”

⁸ Without hesitation, Boaz came into the house and found me. Then he said,

“Listen carefully to what I have to say. Do not go to another field to glean. Stay at this one with my women servants until the harvesting of this field is finished.⁹ Then watch where my maidens go next, and follow them to that field.

Glean there. You'll be safe because I have ordered my servants not to hurt you. When you are thirsty, drink water out of the jars of water my servants have filled."

¹⁰ After he had said all of that to me, I bowed down before him, and said,

"Why are you being so nice to me since I am a foreigner in your land?"

¹¹ Then he told me,

"I am fully aware of all of the ways in which you have been faithful to Naomi after the death of Elimelech. You were brave to leave your mother and father and come to live among a people you did not know. ¹² I pray the Lord, the God of Israel, will reward you abundantly now that you have espoused Jehovah and taken refuge under His wings."

¹³ I responded with,

"Thank you for being so kind to me even though I am not like your servant girls. I am really encouraged."

¹⁴ At meal time Boaz invited me to join the rest of the workers for lunch. He said,

"Come, join us for lunch. Eat some the bread, and dip your bread into the vinegar."

So, I sat down among the other workers, and to my surprise Boaz served me roasted grain. I couldn't believe that he personally would serve me instead of having his servants do it. I ate until I was full and had some left over to take to Naomi at the end of the day. ¹⁵ When I arose from lunch to continue gleaning, Boaz gave orders to his servants, and said,

"Let her glean among the reapers, and don't insult her or call her down for doing so. ¹⁶ In fact, purposely leave some of the grain for her to glean, and don't rebuke her for gleaning it."

¹⁷ Well, I gleaned in the field until evening. When I had finished beating out what I had gleaned, I was amazed that I had gleaned about a half bushel. ¹⁸ After finishing, I returned to the city. When I entered our house, Naomi saw how much I had gleaned and was surprised. I set down the gleaned grain and reached into my pouch to retrieve the grain that was left over after I had eaten my fill. Then I gave it to Naomi for supper. ¹⁹ After she had finished eating, Naomi said,

"Where did you glean today, and whose field was it? I praise the Lord for whoever it was that took notice of you."

So, I told her that the man's name was Boaz. ²⁰ As soon as she heard it, she broke out in praise. She said,

“Praise the Lord, because He has not completely withdrawn His kindness after all. Now He has shown kindness to those of us who are still living and to our dead relatives. This man, Boaz, is a close relative of my deceased husband, Elimelech. In fact, he is one of the closest relatives and could become our redeemer.”

²¹ Then I told her that he not only took notice of me, but he told me to work closely with his servants until the harvest was finished. ²² Naomi said that it was good that I stay close to his servants. That way I would not be molested by workers in another man’s field. ²³ So, I intended to stay close by his maidens until both the barley harvest and the wheat harvest were completed. All the while, I lived with Naomi in her house.

The Proposal

^{3:1} Near the end of the barley harvest, Naomi said to me,

“My daughter, I want you to find security and live a blessed life. ² You know that Boaz is our close relative. He could be our kinsman redeemer if he wishes. Tonight he is going to winnow barley at the threshing floor, and I want you to go to him. (The Lord had prompted Boaz to go to the threshing floor and help the workers personally.) ³ Take a bath, put on some good perfume, and wear your best dress. Then go to the threshing floor. Don’t let anyone know you are there until Boaz has finished his meal and has drunk enough wine to become merry. ⁴ Notice where he lies down, and once he is asleep, go to him, uncover his feet, and lie down beside him. When he wakes up he will tell you what you should do.”

⁵ Well, I told her that I would do everything she had instructed me to do. ⁶ After getting dressed, I went to the threshing floor but stayed out of sight until Boaz had eaten and drunk enough to be merry. During the whole time my heart was pounding in my chest with excitement. ⁷ I saw him lay down by a heap of wheat, so after he was peacefully asleep, I crept over to where he lay and uncovered his feet. Then I lay down beside him and waited. I was so excited that that there was no way I was going to sleep.

⁸ Sometime during the middle of the night Boaz awoke with a start. He sat straight up, and to his surprise, a woman was lying at his feet. ⁹ Without a moment’s hesitation, he asked,

“Who are you?”

I answered,

“I am Ruth, your maid. So spread your blanket over me to show that you will redeem me since you are a close relative.”

¹⁰ Then he said to me,

“The Lord bless you, my daughter. This last kindness is better than all of the kind things you have done in the past. I say this because you have not chased

young men to marry regardless of whether they were rich or poor. ¹¹ Now, don't be afraid. I will do all that you have asked, because the whole city knows that you are a woman of excellent character. ¹² Now, it is true that I am a close relative, but there is another man who is a closer relative. ¹³ Wait here until dawn, and in the morning I will see if he will redeem you. If he does, good. Let him redeem you. But if he doesn't, as sure as the Lord lives, I will redeem you. Now, lie down until morning."

¹⁴⁻¹⁵ So, I lay at his feet until morning. As I lay there, my mind was going ninety miles per hour. (I was grateful that the Lord had not allowed Boaz to take a wife before I showed up. It was definitely the Lord's doing.) I got up just before dawn and got ready to return to my house. I needed to leave before people could recognize each other so that no one would know that I had been to the threshing floor. As I turned to leave, Boaz said to me,

"It is important that no one knows that you have been here. Before you leave, hold out your coat so that I can send you home with a gift. Here are six measures of barley so that you don't go back to Naomi empty-handed."

Once he had finished, I found my way home. ¹⁶ When I got there, Naomi saw me and wanted to know how it went. She wanted to know every little detail. ¹⁷ So, I told her all that had transpired, including how he had given me the six measures of grain because he didn't want me to return to her empty-handed. She was pleased, and said,

¹⁸ "Wait here with me until we find out what Boaz is going to do. Be assured that he won't rest until this matter is settled today. I am encouraged."

The Marriage

^{4:1} In the morning, Boaz went to the city gate where all of the important matters were transacted, and he sat down. Before long the closer relative walked by. Immediately Boaz invited him to sit down next to him, and he did. ² Then Boaz invited ten men of the city to sit down near him as witnesses. ³ As soon as they were all seated, he turned to the closer relative, and said,

⁴ "Naomi has returned to Bethlehem, and she needs to sell all of the property that belonged to our brother Elimelech. I wanted to let you know about it so that you can buy it in the presence of these ten witnesses. It is yours if you want it. If you choose to redeem it, by all means do so. But, if not, I am next in line. If you don't redeem it, I will."

Without hesitation, the closer relative said he would redeem it. ⁵ Then Boaz added,

"Oh, by the way, if you redeem the property, you will be required to marry Ruth the Moabites in order to raise up children in Elimelech's name."

⁶ The closer relative immediately replied,

“No, no! I can’t redeem that. Doing so would jeopardize my own inheritance, and I won’t do that. You redeem her. I give you my right to do so.”

⁷⁻⁸ The closest relative immediately took off his sandal and gave it to Boaz. This was the custom of the day confirming that the transaction was legally completed.

⁹⁻¹⁰ Once the deal had been finalized, Boaz said to the ten witnesses,

“You ten men are witnesses that today I have bought from Naomi all of the property that belonged to Elimelech and all of the property that belonged to his two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. In addition, I have taken Ruth the Moabitess, wife of Mahlon, as my wife, in order to raise up children as a posterity of Elimelech. You are witnesses that today I have married her.”

¹¹⁻¹² All of the people who had witnessed the transaction, including the elders, said to Boaz,

“We have witnessed the transaction, and it is valid. We pray that this woman coming into your home will bear numbers of sons for you. Hopefully, she will bear as many sons as Rachel and Leah. We hope the Lord will make your first-born son famous in Bethlehem and wealthy in the region of Ephrathah.”

¹³ Well, that was the extent of our wedding festivities, but I didn’t care. Boaz loved me and chose me for his own. That’s all that mattered. (The Lord made it happen, and I was thrilled.) So, he took me to his home, and we engaged in sexual union. Praise the Lord, unlike my relations with Mahlon, the Lord allowed me to become pregnant, and soon I gave birth to a healthy baby boy.

¹⁴⁻¹⁵ Once the baby boy arrived, the women of the city gathered around Naomi, and said to her,

“Blessed is the Lord because He has not left you desolate. No, he has provided a redeemer. Boaz redeemed you, but the baby son has redeemed Ruth from the stigma of being barren. We pray that this son will become famous in Israel. We pray also that he will sustain you in your old age. In reality, Ruth is better to you than ten sons of your own because she loves you so deeply. Now she has delivered a son to carry on your name.”

¹⁶ Then Naomi took the baby, laid him in her lap, and became the child’s nurse. In a real sense, she adopted him as her own.¹⁷ The neighboring women said that since a baby had been born to Ruth, the child was to be called Obed. (The name means "who served the Lord of the world with a perfect heart.)² I didn’t have any say in what he was named, but that’s okay.¹⁸⁻²² I didn’t know it while I was still alive, but I was so privileged to bear Obed because he was in the line of Christ. Consider Obed’s family tree:

Perez bore a son named Hezron,
Hezron bore a son named Ram,
Ram bore a son named Amminadab,
Amminadab bore a son named Nashon,

Nashon bore a son named Salmon,
Salmon bore a son named Boaz,
Boaz bore a son named Obed,
my son Obed bore a son named Jesse, and
Jesse bore a son named David

God's hand certainly did manipulate circumstances to get me where I needed to be in order to gain this privileged position. Praise His holy name.

¹ Keil and Delitzsch, part of Esword

² John Gill commentary, part of ESword

Consider with me how the Lord led me even though I didn't realize it at the time:

1. God caused a famine, otherwise Elimelech would not have entertained the idea of moving to Moab.
2. Since Elimelech was determined to move, God directed him to go to Moab, to my town, and to my neighborhood so that Naomi and I would become good friends.
3. God used the death of Elimelech to prompt Naomi to seek wives for her sons.
4. God used my close relationship with Naomi to cause Mahlon to find me desirable enough to become his wife. If Mahlon had not married me, I would not have been part of the family when Naomi decided to go back to Bethlehem
5. God did not allow Mahlon and me to conceive children knowing that Boaz may not have wanted to marry a woman with kids running all over town.
6. God allowed both Mahlon and Chilion to die knowing that the loss would cause Naomi to entertain the idea of moving back to Bethlehem. If either one of the sons had lived he would have been able to support the three of us.
7. God gave me such a deep love for Naomi that I was committed to going to a strange land with her and live among its strange culture.
8. God gave me a desire to work with my hands to provide food for us. In fact, it is clear that He directed me to the field belonging to Boaz otherwise we would not have met.
9. God caused my good reputation to be known by everyone in town. Boaz knew it, otherwise he would likely have seen me as just another widow trying to eek out a living.
10. God gave Boaz eyes to fall in love with me.

11. God caused Naomi's closest relative to reject me as a wife so that Boaz was free to marry me.

12. Unlike with my marriage to Mahlon, God allowed me to conceive and bear a son in the line of Christ.

Conclusion

Have you ever looked back at your life to see all of the ways God led and protected you? It may have been something small, or it may have been something big and important. In either case, it is a blessing to see how God actively works and leads in our lives. I encourage you to take the time to examine your life. I am sure you will be blessed by it.

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