

Adult Bible Class

The Book of Ruth

Sunday School Lesson

The book of Ruth is a short Old Testament book of the Bible, placed after the book of Judges. The story takes place during the same time period as the Judges (probably between 1250 and 1150 B.C., but we can't be sure).

Ruth Chapter 1

Ruth 1:1 (NLT) In the days when the judges ruled in Israel, a severe famine came upon the land.

God was king over the land and people of Israel. Famine was not something that happened by chance. Moses told the people before they entered into the land:

Deuteronomy 11:11 . . . the land you will soon take over is a land of hills and valleys with plenty of rain— **12** a land that the Lord your God cares for. He watches over it through each season of the year! **13** “If you carefully obey the commands I am giving you today, and if you love the Lord your God and serve him with all your heart and soul, **14** then he will send the rains in their proper seasons—the early and late rains—so you can bring in your harvests of grain, new wine, and olive oil. **15** He will give you lush pastureland for your livestock, and you yourselves will have all you want to eat. **16** “But be careful. Don’t let your heart be deceived so that you turn away from the Lord and serve and worship other gods. **17** If you do, the Lord’s anger will burn against you. He will shut up the sky and hold back the rain, and the ground will fail to produce its harvests. Then you will quickly die in that good land the Lord is giving you.

The people of Israel were experiencing famine in the “land flowing with milk and honey” because they had once again turned from the one true God to serve idols. God intended that the famine would get their attention and turn them back to Him.



Ruth 1:1 (NLT) . . . So a man from Bethlehem in Judah left his home and went to live in the country of Moab, taking his wife and two sons with him. **2** The man’s name was Elimelech, and his wife was Naomi. Their two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in the land of Judah. And when they reached Moab, they settled there.

Moab was not far from Bethlehem, yet it had not been touched by the drought. Ironically, the name *Bethlehem* means “house of bread,” yet these Bethlehemites were leaving their homeland to escape famine.

Elimelech made the decision to take his family away from the land of promise. If he had known and believed the word of God, he could have repented and encouraged other Israelites to repent and return to God as well. But instead he took matters into his own hands. Leaving the land of promise should not

have been an option. But Elimelech and his family left for Moab where there was food. The Hebrew language indicates that they intended their stay in Moab to be a temporary one.

The land of Israel is a special place. It is God's land given to God's people. Should an Israelite fall on hard times, God made provision for the land to go back to its original family owners should it be sold:

Leviticus 25:23 "The land must never be sold on a permanent basis, for the land belongs to me. You are only foreigners and tenant farmers working for me.

24 "With every purchase of land you must grant the seller the right to buy it back. **25** If one of your fellow Israelites falls into poverty and is forced to sell some family land, then a close relative should buy it back for him. **26** If there is no close relative to buy the land, but the person who sold it gets enough money to buy it back, **27** he then has the right to redeem it from the one who bought it . . .

28 But if the original owner cannot afford to buy back the land, it will remain with the new owner until the next Year of Jubilee. In the jubilee year, the land must be returned to the original owners so they can return to their family land.

For Elimelech to even think of leaving the land that God had given was a very serious thing indeed.

3 Then Elimelech died, and Naomi was left with her two sons. **4** The two sons married Moabite women. One married a woman named Orpah, and the other a woman named Ruth. But about ten years later, **5** both Mahlon and Kilion died. This left Naomi alone, without her two sons or her husband.

Leaving the famine in Bethlehem did not help Elimelech. He died as a foreigner in a foreign land, and his wife was left with their two sons. Though Moab might have been fine for Moabites, Elimelech was an Israelite, and he did not belong there. The Moabites were worshipers of Chemosh - not the one true God of Israel. Elimelech's two sons, Mahlon and Kilion, married women of Moab.

Then bad turned to worse when Naomi's two sons died. She was left with her two daughters-in-law.

Naomi and Ruth Return

6 Then Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had blessed his people in Judah by giving them good crops again. So Naomi and her daughters-in-law got ready to leave Moab to return to her homeland. **7** With her two daughters-in-law she set out from the place where she had been living, and they took the road that would lead them back to Judah.

The famine in Judah was over. Naomi made plans to return to her home in Bethlehem.

8 But on the way, Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back to your mothers' homes. And may the Lord reward you for your kindness to your husbands and to me. **9** May the Lord bless you with the security of another marriage." Then she kissed them good-bye, and they all broke down and wept.

10 "No," they said. "We want to go with you to your people."

11 But Naomi replied, "Why should you go on with me? Can I still give birth to other sons who could grow up to be your husbands? **12** No, my daughters, return to your parents' homes, for I am too old to marry again. And even if it were possible, and I were to get married tonight and bear sons, then what? **13** Would you wait for them to grow up and refuse to marry someone else? No, of course not, my daughters! Things are far more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord himself has raised his fist against me."

Though Naomi said that the hand of the Lord was against her, this was not so. Naomi was simply reaping what her family sowed. Other Israelites stayed in Israel during the famine, toughing it out - and hopefully turning to God like they did in the time of Gideon. The decision to leave was their own doing, and their suffering was the result of that decision. The law of God was plain, and when God's people disobey God's law, they will reap the results of disobedience.

Moses said concerning widows:

Deuteronomy 25:5 "If two brothers are living together on the same property and one of them dies without a son, his widow may not be married to anyone from outside the family. Instead, her husband's brother should marry her . . . to fulfill the duties of a brother-in-law. **6** The first son she bears to him will be considered the son of the dead brother, so that his name will not be forgotten in Israel.

Naomi was referring to this law when she said, "*Can I still give birth to other sons who could grow up to be your husbands?*" But since Naomi had no more sons - and not even a husband to father more sons - Ruth and Orpah should go back to their parents' home to rebuild their lives. This made sense. Orpah and Ruth had stronger family ties in Moab than they did with Naomi. It made sense for them to stay in Moab instead of going to a new land - Israel - with Naomi.

Ruth 1:14 And again they wept together, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye. But Ruth clung tightly to Naomi. **15** "Look," Naomi said to her, "your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. You should do the same."

16 But Ruth replied, "Don't ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. **17** Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!" **18** When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she said nothing more.

Orpah displayed a lot of sentiment toward Naomi, but she went back to her people and her gods. Ruth, however, would not leave her mother-in-law. She was willing to leave her people, her customs, and her way of life to live in a new land with a new people - with new customs and laws. She was willing to forsake the gods of her childhood and follow the God of Israel. She was willing to leave Moab and never go back, for she said she would be buried in Israel.

Ten years of Naomi's compromise in Moab never made Ruth turn to the God of Israel. But as soon as Naomi stood and said, "I'm going back to the God of Israel to put my fate into His hands," then Ruth stood with her. Taking a stand for Israel and the God of Israel caused Ruth to take a stand to stay with Naomi.

19 So the two of them continued on their journey. When they came to Bethlehem, the entire town was excited by their arrival. "Is it really Naomi?" the women asked.

20 "Don't call me Naomi," she responded. "Instead, call me Mara, for the Almighty has made life very bitter for me. **21** I went away full, but the Lord has brought me home empty. Why call me Naomi when the Lord has caused me to suffer and the Almighty has sent such tragedy upon me?"

22 So Naomi returned from Moab, accompanied by her daughter-in-law Ruth, the young Moabite woman. They arrived in Bethlehem in late spring, at the beginning of the barley harvest.

It seems that Naomi was from a prominent family in Bethlehem, for everyone knew her. Naomi makes the mistake of saying that "*the Almighty has made life very*

bitter for me,” and “the Lord has caused me to suffer and the Almighty has sent such tragedy upon me.” These are the words of someone who has experienced much sorrow. The name *Naomi* means “pleasant,” but Naomi calls herself *Mara*, which means “bitter.” She has experienced much loss, and this can make a person bitter. Yet, Naomi was not bitter against the Lord personally. She had returned to Bethlehem to make things right once again.

Barley was the first crop in Israel to ripen in the spring. They had arrived just in time for barley harvest.

To be a childless widow was to be among the lowest, most disadvantaged classes in the ancient world. A childless widow had no one to support her, and she had to live on the generosity of strangers. But this season of barley harvest was going to change things for Naomi and Ruth.

It would have been easy for Naomi to focus on what she had lost - a husband, two sons, and one daughter-in-law, as well as many material possessions. All she had left was Ruth, her remaining daughter-in-law. But through this one thing, God was going to bring great blessing into her life.

Ruth Chapter 2

Ruth 2:1 (NLT) Now there was a wealthy and influential man in Bethlehem named Boaz, who was a relative of Naomi’s husband, Elimelech.

2 One day Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, “Let me go out into the harvest fields to pick up the stalks of grain left behind by anyone who is kind enough to let me do it.”

Naomi replied, “All right, my daughter, go ahead.” **3** So Ruth went out to gather grain behind the harvesters. And as it happened, she found herself working in a field that belonged to Boaz, the relative of her father-in-law, Elimelech.

Ruth went out to gather the stalks of grain that were left in the fields. This is called “gleaning” the fields. It was a practice in ancient Israel for the poor and widows to go into any field and take what the reapers left. Scripture says:

Deuteronomy 24:19 “When you are harvesting your crops and forget to bring in a bundle of grain from your field, don’t go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigners, orphans, and widows. Then the Lord your God will bless you in all you do. **20** When you beat the olives from your olive trees, don’t go over the boughs twice. Leave the remaining olives for the foreigners, orphans, and widows. **21** When you gather the grapes in your vineyard, don’t glean the vines after they are picked. Leave the remaining grapes for the foreigners, orphans, and widows. **22** Remember that you were slaves in the land of Egypt. That is why I am giving you this command.

Leviticus 19:9 “When you harvest the crops of your land, do not harvest the grain along the edges of your fields, and do not pick up what the harvesters drop. **10** It is the same with your grape crop—do not strip every last bunch of grapes from the vines, and do not pick up the grapes that fall to the ground. Leave them for the poor and the foreigners living among you. I am the Lord your God.

God in His wisdom gave this law so that the poor would have food to eat - and the dignity of working for their food (not just a handout). God was providing for all of His people.

Ruth began to glean fields that belonged to a wealthy relative of her deceased father-in-law. This wealthy relative - Boaz - was a kinsman (the Hebrew word *goel*, or kinsman, means a close relative who was a leader in the family).

Ruth 2:4 While she was there, Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters. "The Lord be with you!" he said.

"The Lord bless you!" the harvesters replied.

5 Then Boaz asked his foreman, "Who is that young woman over there? Who does she belong to?"

6 And the foreman replied, "She is the young woman from Moab who came back with Naomi. **7** She asked me this morning if she could gather grain behind the harvesters. She has been hard at work ever since, except for a few minutes' rest in the shelter."

Boaz noticed Ruth. He was so impressed with her, that he asked questions to find out who she was and what family she belonged to.

8 Boaz went over and said to Ruth, "Listen, my daughter. Stay right here with us when you gather grain; don't go to any other fields. Stay right behind the young women working in my field. **9** See which part of the field they are harvesting, and then follow them. I have warned the young men not to treat you roughly. And when you are thirsty, help yourself to the water they have drawn from the well."

Boaz was watching out for Ruth. She was to stay next to the women workers. Also, the young men were to treat her well. Water was provided to quench her thirst.

10 Ruth fell at his feet and thanked him warmly. "What have I done to deserve such kindness?" she asked. "I am only a foreigner."

11 "Yes, I know," Boaz replied. "But I also know about everything you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband. I have heard how you left your father and mother and your own land to live here among complete strangers. **12** May the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge, reward you fully for what you have done."

13 "I hope I continue to please you, sir," she replied. "You have comforted me by speaking so kindly to me, even though I am not one of your workers."

14 At mealtime Boaz called to her, "Come over here, and help yourself to some food. You can dip your bread in the sour wine." So she sat with his harvesters, and Boaz gave her some roasted grain to eat. She ate all she wanted and still had some left over.

15 When Ruth went back to work again, Boaz ordered his young men, "Let her gather grain right among the sheaves without stopping her. **16** And pull out some heads of barley from the bundles and drop them on purpose for her. Let her pick them up, and don't give her a hard time!"

17 So Ruth gathered barley there all day, and when she beat out the grain that evening, it filled an entire basket. **18** She carried it back into town and showed it to her mother-in-law. Ruth also gave her the roasted grain that was left over from her meal.

Ruth is like Rebecca of old who worked hard watering the camels and who was not afraid to leave her homeland to go to Canaan's land. Ruth's character shines through. She is a hard worker, gathering barley by day and threshing it by night. She is a thankful soul, speaking with gratitude to Boaz for his kindness. She is respectful, bowing at the feet of Boaz, a great man in Bethlehem. She thinks of others as she brings part of her left over supper to Naomi along with the grain that she gathered and threshed.

19 "Where did you gather all this grain today?" Naomi asked. "Where did you work? May the Lord bless the one who helped you!"

So Ruth told her mother-in-law about the man in whose field she had worked. She said, "The man I worked with today is named Boaz."

20 "May the Lord bless him!" Naomi told her daughter-in-law. "He is showing his kindness to us as well as to your dead husband. That man is one of our closest relatives, one of our family redeemers."

21 Then Ruth said, "What's more, Boaz even told me to come back and stay with his harvesters until the entire harvest is completed."

22 "Good!" Naomi exclaimed. "Do as he said, my daughter. Stay with his young women right through the whole harvest. You might be harassed in other fields, but you'll be safe with him."

23 So Ruth worked alongside the women in Boaz's fields and gathered grain with them until the end of the barley harvest. Then she continued working with them through the wheat harvest in early summer. And all the while she lived with her mother-in-law.

A "family redeemer," or "kinsman redeemer" (*goel*) was someone in Old Testament Law who was able to help a relative who was in trouble, danger, or need. Boaz is the "kinsman redeemer" in the story of Ruth.

Leviticus 25:25 If one of your fellow Israelites falls into poverty and is forced to sell some family land, then a close relative should buy it back for him.

We have seen how Boaz cared for Ruth, giving her every advantage. He called her "my daughter" because there was some age difference between the two of them.

Ruth Chapter 3

Ruth 3:1 One day Naomi said to Ruth, "My daughter, it's time that I found a permanent home for you, so that you will be provided for. **2** Boaz is a close relative of ours, and he's been very kind by letting you gather grain with his young women. Tonight he will be winnowing barley at the threshing floor. **3** Now do as I tell you—take a bath and put on perfume and dress in your nicest clothes. Then go to the threshing floor, but don't let Boaz see you until he has finished eating and drinking. **4** Be sure to notice where he lies down; then go and uncover his feet and lie down there. He will tell you what to do."

5 "I will do everything you say," Ruth replied.

Naomi knew that Ruth needed to marry to have the security of a loving husband and a home. Her suggestion to Ruth to make herself attractive to Boaz is rooted in the responsibility of the *goel*.

The *goel* had many responsibilities in the family. He was responsible to buy a family member out of slavery (Lev. 25:48). He was to be the "avenger of blood" should a family member be the victim of the crime of murder (Numbers 35:19). He was responsible to buy back family land that had been sold in hard times (Lev. 25:25). And...he was responsible to carry on the family name by marrying a childless widow (Deut. 25:5-10). Therefore, the *goel* was responsible for the people, the property, and the posterity of the family.

6 So she went down to the threshing floor that night and followed the instructions of her mother-in-law.

7 After Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits, he lay down at the far end of the pile of grain and went to sleep. Then Ruth came quietly, uncovered his feet, and lay down.

We may think that what Ruth did - putting on her nicest clothes, wearing perfume, uncovering the feet of Boaz and lying down there - was improper, but what

Ruth did was according to the law of Israel. In fact, lying at the feet of Boaz was an act of submission - like a servant would do.

We must not forget that it was known that Boaz was a kinsman redeemer in the family, and it was expected that he “redeem” Ruth and marry her to perpetuate the family name of her dead husband, Mahlon, who had no children. But Ruth did not demand her rights, but she humbly trusted her fate to Boaz by waiting at his feet. For weeks - and perhaps months - Boaz had watched Ruth very carefully... and Ruth had seen the kindness of Boaz. Ruth had seen enough of the character of Boaz to place her life into his hands by sitting at his feet.

8 Around midnight Boaz suddenly woke up and turned over. He was surprised to find a woman lying at his feet! **9** “Who are you?” he asked.

“I am your servant Ruth,” she replied. “Spread the corner of your covering over me, for you are my family redeemer.”

Boaz was sleeping by the piles of grain to protect against thieves in the night. Therefore, he was startled to find someone there. When Ruth told Boaz to “*spread the corner of your covering over me,*” she was saying, “I am a widow. Please take me as your wife.” It was a common custom in the Middle East for a man to throw the skirt of his garment over a woman to say that he was taking her under his protection in marriage. Ruth called Boaz her “family redeemer” or kinsman redeemer.

10 “The Lord bless you, my daughter!” Boaz exclaimed. “You are showing even more family loyalty now than you did before, for you have not gone after a younger man, whether rich or poor. **11** Now don’t worry about a thing, my daughter. I will do what is necessary, for everyone in town knows you are a virtuous woman.”

Perhaps Boaz thought Ruth would not be interested in him since he was an older man. Boaz is pleased! He compliments her as a “virtuous woman.”

12 But while it’s true that I am one of your family redeemers, there is another man who is more closely related to you than I am. **13** Stay here tonight, and in the morning I will talk to him. If he is willing to redeem you, very well. Let him marry you. But if he is not willing, then as surely as the Lord lives, I will redeem you myself! Now lie down here until morning.”

14 So Ruth lay at Boaz’s feet until the morning, but she got up before it was light enough for people to recognize each other. For Boaz had said, “No one must know that a woman was here at the threshing floor.” **15** Then Boaz said to her, “Bring your cloak and spread it out.” He measured six scoops of barley into the cloak and placed it on her back. Then he returned to the town.

Boaz knew that there was a *goel* that was more closely related - and that he would have the right to marry Ruth if he chose. Boaz would approach him about the matter. He keeps the matter of Ruth’s presence there a secret because he wants to talk to the other *goel* about Ruth before the word gets out that Ruth approached Boaz. This would be to his advantage.

16 When Ruth went back to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked, “What happened, my daughter?” Ruth told Naomi everything Boaz had done for her, **17** and she added, “He gave me these six scoops of barley and said, ‘Don’t go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.’”

18 Then Naomi said to her, “Just be patient, my daughter, until we hear what happens. The man won’t rest until he has settled things today.”

Boaz was more than willing to marry “virtuous” Ruth. However, there was another man who was a closer relative. He would have the first option of marrying Ruth and redeeming the family property. All they could do was wait and see what would be decided.

Ruth Chapter 4

Ruth 4:1 Boaz went to the town gate and took a seat there. Just then the family redeemer he had mentioned came by, so Boaz called out to him, “Come over here and sit down, friend. I want to talk to you.” So they sat down together. **2** Then Boaz called ten leaders from the town and asked them to sit as witnesses.

The gate of the city was where judicial matters were resolved by the elders of the community. It was also the place for official business.

3 And Boaz said to the family redeemer, “You know Naomi, who came back from Moab. She is selling the land that belonged to our relative Elimelech. **4** I thought I should speak to you about it so that you can redeem it if you wish. If you want the land, then buy it here in the presence of these witnesses. But if you don’t want it, let me know right away, because I am next in line to redeem it after you.” The man replied, “All right, I’ll redeem it.”

5 Then Boaz told him, “Of course, your purchase of the land from Naomi also requires that you marry Ruth, the Moabite widow. That way she can have children who will carry on her husband’s name and keep the land in the family.”

6 “Then I can’t redeem it,” the family redeemer replied, “because this might endanger my own estate. You redeem the land; I cannot do it.”

Boaz catches off guard the other family redeemer (whose name is not mentioned) when he mentions Ruth and her situation. Boaz wisely mentions the land first - then that Ruth, a Moabite widow, goes with the land! The unnamed goel relinquishes his rights to the land and Ruth.

Remember that it was the responsibility of the *goel* to protect the people, property, and posterity of the family. The unnamed goel was not willing to do this after he found out about the Moabite widow.

7 Now in those days it was the custom in Israel for anyone transferring a right of purchase to remove his sandal and hand it to the other party. This publicly validated the transaction. **8** So the other family redeemer drew off his sandal as he said to Boaz, “You buy the land.”

9 Then Boaz said to the elders and to the crowd standing around, “You are witnesses that today I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Kilion, and Mahlon. **10** And with the land I have acquired Ruth, the Moabite widow of Mahlon, to be my wife. This way she can have a son to carry on the family name of her dead husband and to inherit the family property here in his hometown. You are all witnesses today.”

It was official! Boaz acquired the land and he got the girl! The name of Mahlon would continue through Boaz and Ruth. In this public transaction everything was legal and official.

11 Then the elders and all the people standing in the gate replied, “We are witnesses! May the Lord make this woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, from whom all the nation of Israel descended! May you prosper in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. **12** And may the Lord give you descendants by this young woman who will be like those of our ancestor Perez, the son of Tamar and Judah.”

The beautiful Ruth would marry the wealthy and handsome Boaz! How romantic! Blessings were given to Boaz by the people of Bethlehem.

The Descendants of Boaz

13 So Boaz took Ruth into his home, and she became his wife. When he slept with her, the Lord enabled her to become pregnant, and she gave birth to a son. **14** Then the women of the town said to Naomi, "Praise the Lord, who has now provided a redeemer for your family! May this child be famous in Israel. **15** May he restore your youth and care for you in your old age. For he is the son of your daughter-in-law who loves you and has been better to you than seven sons!"

16 Naomi took the baby and cuddled him to her breast. And she cared for him as if he were her own.

Naomi once called herself *Mara* which means "bitter," but look at her now! She has been blessed through her faithful daughter-in-law, Ruth, who was not even an Israelite, but has now been grafted into the nation of Israel by marriage to Boaz. Naomi is enjoying the pleasures of being a grandmother.

17 The neighbor women said, "Now at last Naomi has a son again!" And they named him Obed. He became the father of Jesse and the grandfather of David.

18 This is the genealogical record of their ancestor Perez:
Perez was the father of Hezron.

19 Hezron was the father of Ram.
Ram was the father of Amminadab.

20 Amminadab was the father of Nahshon.
Nahshon was the father of Salmon.

21 Salmon was the father of Boaz.
Boaz was the father of Obed.

22 Obed was the father of Jesse.
Jesse was the father of David.

Conclusion

Ruth, as a type or picture of the Gentile church, went from being an idol worshiper in a foreign country to a great woman and wife of a wealthy and powerful man in Israel. Her willingness to leave her country, her family, and her gods resulted in tremendous blessing and advancement. Her noble descendant was King David, and from David came the Lord Jesus Christ.

Boaz is a picture of our Lord Jesus Christ - our kinsman redeemer, whose bride is His Gentile church. Jesus was born into the human family so he could save us. Jesus bought us back from the slavery of sin. When Jesus returns, he will also redeem this earth that was sold to sin, and he will rule and reign over it. Just as Boaz loved Ruth and developed a plan to have her, Jesus Christ loves the church and has a great plan of salvation.

Just as Ruth sat at the feet of Boaz, we must fall at the feet of Jesus, beseeching Him to be our redeemer. We have nothing to offer but ourselves, but that is what He desires. Like Ruth, we sit at his feet until the morning comes and that great day when the church will become the bride of Christ.