

17 The Life of Ruth

This lessons looks at the book of Ruth. Although the book is very short, it has a wonderful message for all of us. It tells of a woman who was from a country called Moab, and how she came to follow Israel's God. The setting for the book is during the times of the Judges, about 1200 years before Jesus was born.

Elimelech's family move to Moab

The book starts with a family: Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. They lived in the town of Bethlehem (a town that many years later became famous as the birthplace of Jesus). There was a drought at this time; there was very little food. Elimelech decided to move to the country of Moab and live there until the drought was over. So the whole family left Israel and went to Moab.

The family was in Moab for many years. The two sons married girls from Moab: Orpah and Ruth.

During this time, Elimelech died, and so did his two sons. The three women were now widows: Naomi, Orpah and Ruth. In those times, a woman could not live and work alone. So Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem, to be with her family. Ruth and Orpah wanted to return with her.

The return to Bethlehem

They started their long journey back to Bethlehem. On the way, Naomi told Ruth and Orpah that while she loved them, they would be better to stay in Moab with their families. They would find life hard in Israel, and they may not find husbands to care for them.

The two women were very sad, because they loved and admired Naomi. Orpah decided that she would stay in Moab. Ruth was different. She wanted to stay with Naomi for the rest of her life. To follow Naomi wherever she would go; worship Naomi's God; live with Naomi's people. What did Ruth say?

When Naomi saw that Ruth was so determined, she did not argue anymore. So they both went on to Bethlehem.

Everyone in Bethlehem was glad to see Naomi return, and they all heard how wonderful Ruth was.



*Entreat me not to leave you
or to return from following you;
for where you go I will go,
and where you lodge I will lodge;
your people shall be my people,
and your God my God*

Ruth 1:16 

Israel's law

We need to understand the Law that was in Israel at the time:

1. Elimelech had a piece of land that would go to his sons when he died.
2. Elimelech had died in Moab. His sons had also died without having any children.
3. If a man died without having any children, the closest relative had to marry the dead man's widow. Any sons that were born inherited the land belonging to the dead man.
4. Therefore, a close relative had to marry Ruth, and the child that would be born would be as if he was a child of Mahlon.
5. This had to be done so that the family name of Elimelech and Mahlon would not end.

Ruth and Boaz

Naomi and Ruth were back home, but they had no money and no food. They did have land and also a home. It was the time of the barley harvest. The Law said that when a field was harvested, the poor people could pick up any grain that had not been collected the first time. Naomi told Ruth to go to a field nearby and pick up the grain that was left over. Ruth did so, and she worked in the fields of a man named Boaz. Boaz was a close relative of Naomi, but Ruth did not know this. Boaz was very kind to Ruth, and let her take as much grain as she wanted. He even told his workers to leave extra grain lying around for Ruth to pick up. Boaz was very kind to her.

When Ruth returned home and told Naomi all that had happened, Ruth found out that Boaz was the near relative, and that Ruth should go and ask him to take the property of her late husband Mahlon.

Ruth did so, and soon Boaz and Ruth were married, and there was great happiness for Naomi. When Ruth had a baby son, named Obed, Naomi was the child's nurse, caring for it. Obed grew up to become the father of Jesse. Jesse was the father of the great King David.

So even though Ruth came from outside of Israel, she was part of the royal line that brought the kings of Israel, and eventually brought Jesus Christ.



Conclusion

What do we learn from the life of Ruth? We learn that God wants everyone to come to Him and serve Him. It does not matter who we are; it does not matter what country we are from. God sent His Son Jesus into the world to save all men and women. We all need to come to God, to read His book, obey His Laws, and to live as His children.

Ruth is not a long book, and it is easy to read. Please read it when you have time.