

RUTH

Ruth 3-4

Lesson Aim

That your students will recognize God's sovereign hand in the book of Ruth and in their lives, and be thankful for the redemption wrought by Ruth's descendant, Jesus Christ.

Memory Verse

Review Judges 2:11-23.

Lesson Background

The story of Ruth, begun in the first two chapters studied last week, continues, culminating in Ruth's marriage to Boaz. Naomi, no longer thinking marriage for her daughter-in-law impossible, had a plan to secure Ruth a husband. Ruth agreed to do what Naomi advised and went to the threshing floor of Boaz. A threshing floor, located in an open place, was merely a level patch of beaten earth or stone on which crops were flailed to separate the grain from the chaff. The harvest was then tossed into the air and the lighter chaff was blown away, leaving the good grain. After the day's threshing was done and Boaz fell asleep at the far end of the grain pile, Ruth uncovered his feet and lay down. When Boaz awoke to discover a woman at his feet in the middle of the night, Ruth asked him to spread the corner of his garment over her, since he was a kinsman-redeemer (גאל - *goel*). Ruth's actions indicated that she wanted to come under Boaz' protection, that she wanted him to marry her. Boaz viewed Ruth's request as a great kindness (an amazing statement since she was the foreigner dependent on his mercy), but said that a nearer

relative had first priority if he wanted to claim Ruth as his own. In the morning, Boaz sent Ruth back to Naomi with more grain and promised her with a strong vow (3:13) that, if possible, he would redeem her. The nearer kinsman was unwilling to marry Ruth because in so doing he would jeopardize his own estate, since Ruth's first son would share his inheritance, but as a son of Mahlon (Deuteronomy 25:5-10). Boaz then gladly bought the property of Elimelech, Kilion, and Mahlon and Ruth as his wife. So Boaz married Ruth and they had a son, Obed (*servant*), who became the father of Jesse, the father of David, the forefather of Jesus.

Although the New Testament does not speak of Ruth in any typological way, some have regarded the book of Ruth as a picture of the gospel, and there are certainly some strong parallels from which we can learn. As a foreigner, Ruth had no hope of receiving anything good. She was completely dependent on the provision of Boaz. Boaz sought Ruth out and was kind to her. Ruth asked Boaz to protect her and marry her. Boaz willingly agreed and bought her from someone who had prior claim to her. Ruth married Boaz and shared in his inheritance. An alien, outcast from God's people, Ruth was brought into a covenant family (I Peter 2:1) and became an instrument to glorify God.

We can also learn from the godly characters of Boaz, Ruth, and Naomi, as your students saw last week, but perhaps the most significant theme in the book is God's sovereign kindness. Step by step the Lord brought about events and brought people together to fulfill His purpose. A famine led Naomi's family to Moab; her boys married Moabite girls; Mahlon and Kilion died; conditions improved in Israel and Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem; Ruth returned with her, but Orpah stayed in Moab; Ruth "happened" to glean in Boaz' field; Boaz noticed Ruth and was kind to her; the nearer kinsman did not want to jeopardize his inheritance by marrying Ruth. Circumstance piled upon circumstance, the altering of any one of them changing the end of the story. God is in control of our lives as well. Sometimes it seems as if God is no longer in control of our lives, or if He is, that He does not care for us. Naomi apparently felt this way in light of the trials she endured (famine, leaving home for a strange land, loss of her husband and two sons), for she asked the townspeople no longer to call her Naomi (*pleasant*) but Mara (*bitter*). Yet, as difficult as these things were, God had a purpose in them. Like Job (Job 42:10, 12-17), Naomi was blessed by God and once again knew the happiness of a loving family. While the Lord sovereignly ordered the lives of Boaz, Ruth and Naomi and her family, showing great kindness to them, His plan had a more far-reaching scope. God purposed to have Ruth and Boaz be the forebears of king David, the forefather of Jesus Christ. With complete wisdom, God prepared and protected the lineage of His own Son, Jesus Christ, Who came to be the true Redeemer of His people, chosen before the creation of the world (Ephesians 3:4). For this we praise Him!

Lesson Procedure

Ask your students if they ever felt that God did not care about what happened in their lives or that, if He did, He was not powerful enough to stop it. Naomi had experienced many trials to the point where she was bitter against God. Ask your students if they remember from last week what these troubles were, and use this discussion to review Ruth 1-2 and lead into today's Bible story. Read Ruth 3-4 and discuss, focusing on God's sovereign love toward Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz, and how God does care and have the power to work in His people's lives today. Show how God's working in the individual lives of the people in the book of Ruth was all part of His larger plan to send the Messiah, God's Son, to redeem His chosen people. You may also help your students find gospel parallels in the book of Ruth. After discussing the story, act it out using the following script.

THE STORY OF RUTH

Characters (*major roles; students should play multiple minor roles)

*Narrator

Elimelech, Mahlon, and Kilion

*Naomi

Orpah

*Ruth

*Boaz

nearer kinsman-redeemer

townswomen, foreman, harvesters, elders and townspeople at gate

Props: bundles of household and farming implements, water jar, flail, winnowing fork, bread, a large basket, flowing garment or cape for Boaz, shawl, sandal. Substitutions can be made for these items, or you may choose to do the play without props, pantomiming them instead.

Act 1

Narrator: In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, so a man from Bethlehem in Judah named Elimelech, together with his wife Naomi and sons, Mahlon and Kilion, went to live in Moab (*these characters should pantomime being hungry and not having food, packing up their belongings, and leaving for Moab; as the narration continues, the other actions of which he speaks should be mimed as well*). Then Elimelech died and Naomi was left alone with her two sons. They married Moabite women, Kilion a girl named Orpah, and Mahlon a girl named Ruth. After about ten years, Mahlon and Kilion died. When she heard that the Lord had provided food for people in Israel, Naomi decided to return home. Orpah and Ruth tried to follow her.

Naomi: Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the Lord show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead and to me. May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband. (*Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth embrace and weep*).

Orpah and Ruth: We will go back with you to your people.

Naomi: Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me - even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons - would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord's hand has gone out against me!" (*they weep again; Orpah leaves*). Look, your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.

Ruth: Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me. (*Naomi and Ruth travel to Bethlehem, where they are greeted by a group of townswomen*).

Women: Can this be Naomi?

Naomi: Don't call me Naomi. Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the Lord brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.

Act 2

Ruth: Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor.

Naomi: Go ahead, my daughter. (*Ruth goes and pantomimes gleaning*).

Boaz: (*to harvesters*) The Lord be with you!

Harvesters: The Lord bless you!

Boaz: Whose young woman is that?

Foreman: She is the Moabitess who came back from Moab with Naomi. She said, "Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters." She went into the field and has worked steadily from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter."

Boaz: (*to Ruth*) My daughter, listen to me. Don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here. Stay here with my servant girls. Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the girls. I have told the men not to touch you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled.

Ruth: (*Ruth bows down with face to ground*) Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me, a foreigner?

Boaz: I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband - how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.

Ruth: May I continue to find favor in your eyes, my lord. You have given me comfort and have spoken kindly to your servant - though I do not have the standing of one of your servant girls. (*Ruth continues working while Boaz supervises his workers helping here and there. Then he sits down to eat and Boaz calls to her*).

Boaz: Come over here. Have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar (*Ruth does so and then gets up to glean. Out of her hearing, Boaz speaks to his harvesters.*) Even if she gathers among the sheaves, don't embarrass her. Rather, pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up, and don't rebuke her (*Ruth continues to glean and carries the barley back to Naomi*).

Naomi: Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who took notice of you!

Ruth: The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz.

Naomi: The Lord bless him! He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead. That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers.

Ruth: He even said to me, "Stay with my workers until they finish harvesting all my grain."

Naomi: It will be good for you, my daughter, to go with his girls, because in someone else's field you might be harmed.

Narrator: So Ruth stayed close to the servant girls of Boaz to glean until the barley and wheat harvests were finished. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

Act 3

Narrator: One day, Naomi and Ruth were talking.

Naomi: My daughter, should I not try to find a home for you, where you will be well provided for? Is not Boaz, with whose servant girls you have been, a kinsman of ours? Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. Wash and perfume yourself, and put on your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don't let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do.

Ruth: I will do whatever you say (*Ruth should pantomime the actions Naomi described; Boaz should pantomime eating and drinking, lying down to sleep and then waking up to discover Ruth at his feet*).

Boaz: Who are you?

Ruth: I am your servant Ruth. Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer.

Boaz: The Lord bless you, my daughter. This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier. You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. And now, my daughter, don't be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character. Although it is true that I am near of kin, there is a kinsman-redeemer nearer than I. Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to redeem, good; let him redeem. But if he is not willing, as surely as the Lord lives I will do it. Lie here until morning (*Both Ruth and Boaz sleep*). Don't let it be known that a woman came to the threshing floor. Bring me the shawl you are wearing and hold it out.

Naomi: How did it go, my daughter?

Ruth: *ad lib "wait till you hear..." or similar words, and then have Ruth pantomime talking to Naomi, ending with: He gave me these six measures of barley, saying, "Don't go back to your mother-in-law empty handed.*

Naomi: Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today.

Act 4

Narrator: Meanwhile, Boaz went up to the town gate and sat there until the nearer kinsman-redeemer came along.

Boaz: *(gathering several elders to him)* Sit here *(they do so)*. Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our brother Elimelech. I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest that you buy it in the presence of these seated here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, do so. But if you will not, tell me, so I will know. For no one has the right to do it except you, and I am next in line.

Kinsman-Redeemer: I will redeem it.

Boaz: On the day you buy the land from Naomi and from Ruth the Moabitess, you acquire the dead man's widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property.

Kinsman-Redeemer: Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it. Buy it yourself *(Nearer kinsman-redeemer removes his sandal and gives it to Boaz)*.

Boaz: Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Kilion and Mahlon. I have also acquired Ruth the Moabitess, Mahlon's widow, as my wife in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from the town records. Today you are witnesses!

People: We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. Through the offspring the Lord gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.

Narrator: So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. The Lord enabled her to conceive and she gave birth to a son. They named him Obed, and Naomi took care of him. Obed was the father of Jesse who was the father of king David. And David was the forefather of the Lord Jesus Christ.