

Bi235 Old Testament 2

Lesson Bi235-11 Ruth and Naomi

When God chose Abraham and Sarah to be the ancestors of the chosen people of Israel, he was choosing a specific family. He seemed to be showing favoritism. He had the ability and the right to choose in this way. But, as we have seen, he intended to bless all people in the world through this one family.

As time went on, people who were not descended from Abraham were added to the nation of Israel. A “mixed multitude” left Egypt with Moses (Ex. 12:38). Moses’s wife was a non-Hebrew. Caleb was a non-Hebrew. We saw in Lesson 3 that Rahab and her family were non-Hebrews. The point is that becoming God’s people didn’t depend only on tribal descent from Abraham and Sarah. People who put their trust in Yahweh, the God of Israel, were welcomed into the people of Israel.

The story of Ruth and Naomi is a story of a foreigner becoming part of Israel. As we learned in Lessons 7, 8, and 9, the settlement of the Promised Land was a slow and difficult process. The tribes brought trouble on themselves by their disloyalty to God. The story of Ruth, however, shows us that there were humble villagers who were faithful to God during this time.

In the village of Bethlehem, which means “house of food,” there was a famine. Elimelek and his wife Naomi left Bethlehem for the highlands of Moab, east of the Jordan River. They lived there several years, and their two sons married women from Moab. But Elimelech died, and the two sons also died without heirs. What were Naomi and her daughters-in-law to do?

Naomi felt helpless and hopeless. Tragedy had struck, and she felt God had abandoned her. “Yahweh has turned against me,” she told them. She was too old to marry again and produce children. She was far from her home in Bethlehem. She encouraged her daughters-in-law to stay in Moab. She intended to travel back to Bethlehem where the famine was over.

One of the women decided to stay in Moab. She wept and kissed Naomi good-by. But Ruth decided to go with Naomi, saying, “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” (Ruth 1:16). When Naomi heard this, she stopped urging Ruth to leave her.

They traveled across the river and up to Bethlehem. The barley harvest was underway. The two widows were welcomed by the villagers. Naomi told them, “I went away full, but Yahweh has brought me back empty. My name means ‘pleasant,’ but you should call me ‘Mara,’ which means ‘bitter.’” Naomi blamed God for everything that had happened to her.

Naomi was sad, but she also made plans for herself and Ruth. She knew about a relative of her husband named Boaz. He was a well-to-do farmer with fields of barley. In those days, poor villagers were allowed to gather grain that the harvesters had missed or dropped. Ruth went out to gather some grain for food. She didn’t know it, but she ended up in a field owned by Boaz. God was behind this; it wasn’t a coincidence.

Boaz arrived at his field, and asked his men who the young woman was. “She is the Moabite woman who came back with Naomi,” they answered. “She asked permission to glean and has been busy all day.”

Boaz went over to talk to Ruth. “Don’t go anywhere else, my daughter, but stay in my fields and gather grain. My men will protect you, and you may have some water when you get thirsty.”

Ruth was amazed. “Why have I found such favor with you? I’m a foreigner.”

Boaz said, “I’ve heard all about you. I know what you’ve done for Naomi since your husband died. You left your homeland and came to a village that was new to you. May Yahweh repay you for what you have done. You have taken refuge under God’s care.”

Ruth replied, “Thank you, my lord. You have spoken kindly to me, though I don’t qualify to be one of your servants.” Boaz invited her to sit down with the harvesters and have some lunch. She worked all afternoon and gathered about 13 kilos (30 pounds) of barley. Boaz had told his workers to let her work behind them, and even to leave barley on the ground for her to gather.

Ruth brought back a load of barley and her leftover food from lunch. Naomi asked her where she had worked all day. “I worked in the fields of Boaz,” she said.

“May Yahweh bless him,” cried Naomi, “Yahweh has shown his kindness to the living and the dead. Boaz is one of our family guardians!” (Ruth 2:1-20).

With Naomi’s blessing and Boaz’s permission, Ruth worked behind the harvesters during the barley and wheat harvests. Some weeks later, Naomi made a plan. She encouraged Ruth to go to the place where the grain was being threshed. “Boaz will be there,” she said. “Wash, perfume yourself, and dress in your best clothes. Go down there and wait until Boaz has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down to sleep, go to him and lie down by his feet. When he notices you, he’ll tell you what to do.”

So Ruth did as Naomi instructed. In the middle of the night, Boaz suddenly woke up and noticed somebody at his feet. “Who are you?”

Ruth replied, “I am Ruth your servant. Protect me, since you are a family guardian.” By her action she was asking Boaz to marry her.

“May God bless you,” said Boaz. “You have not run after younger men, whether rich or poor. Don’t be afraid. I will do all you ask. All the people of my town know that you are a woman of noble character. Although it’s true that I’m a family guardian, there is another man who is more closely related than I. If he wants to do his duty as your family guardian, good; let him do it. But if he is not willing, as surely as Yahweh lives, I will do it.”

Before daylight, Ruth got up to leave. “Hold out your shawl,” asked Boaz. Then he loaded the shawl with barley from the threshing floor.” She went back to Naomi and told her how everything had gone.

Naomi said, “Wait, my daughter. Boaz will not rest until the matter is settled” (Ruth 3).

Boaz gathered the village elders together and asked the relative if he was willing to buy the land belonging to Naomi’s dead husband. “I will buy it,” he said.

Boaz said, “When you buy it, you also acquire Ruth, the dead man’s widow. The land will then keep his name attached to it.”

“Then I am not willing to do it,” said the man. “You do it instead.”

So Boaz bought the land and kept it in the family. He also married Ruth, to keep alive the names of her husband and father-in-law. Boaz and Ruth later had a son, named Obed. Obed was the grandfather of David, Israel’s greatest king.

This story is **important** because it shows us that God keeps his promises. Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz live as they are supposed to live under Israel’s way of life, and in this way work out the will of God. Ruth, a Gentile woman from Moab, became a part of the line of King David. Thus she is also named in the line of Christ found in Matthew’s Gospel (1:5).

The **main truth** of this lesson is that while Naomi complains about God’s treatment of her, she continues to live faithfully before him. She has suffered, but she is open to new evidence of God’s loving care for her and Ruth. Slowly her situation improves. God continued to work with Israelite men and women who remained faithful to his ways, even during the settlement period when many were turning away from God.

To **review** this lesson, answer these questions:

1. Why did Naomi think that God had abandoned her? [Pause]
A. If you said, “Her husband and sons died and she was left alone in a foreign land,” you are correct.
2. How did God help Naomi and Ruth? [Pause]
A. If you answered, “He supplied their needs through the custom of gleaning and Boaz’s kindness,” you answered correctly.
3. What does this story and the story of Rahab teach us about God’s generosity? [Pause]
A. If you said, “God chose Abraham, Sarah, and their descendants, and everyone else who trusts him the way they did,” you are right.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to the story at least three times. As you hear the story each time, imagine how it happened. See the events in your own mind. Then tell the story in your own words as you remember it. Ask a friend who has never heard this story to listen to it. Share your own testimony with that friend, about a time when God brought good out of a difficult experience in your life.