

# Character Lessons from the Book of Ruth

***“All scripture  
is given by  
inspiration of God,  
and is profitable  
for doctrine, for  
reproof, for  
correction, for  
instruction in  
righteousness:  
That the man of  
God may be perfect,  
thoroughly  
furnished unto all  
good works.”  
—II Timothy  
3:16,17***

## **THE OLD TESTAMENT**

narrative in the Book of Ruth provides historical insights into the habits of the Israelites, who generally had an agricultural economy and whose experiences were especially supervised by the Heavenly Father. These included special blessings to the nation for faithfulness to God, but also chastisements for disobedience. “Hear this word that the LORD hath spoken against you, O children of

Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.”—Amos 3:1,2

Ruth is one of only two books in the Bible named after women, the other one being Esther. In Hebrews chapter 11 are recorded the names of many individuals who lived before Christ's earthly ministry, whose fidelity to God was noteworthy. However, only two women, Sarah and Rahab, are specifically cited in this listing. Nevertheless, there were additional heroines whose actions demonstrated faith in God, such as Jochebed, who along with her husband hid Moses after his birth. (Exod. 2:1-3; 6:20; Heb. 11:23) There also were many other faithful unnamed women of whom it is written, "Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection."—Heb. 11:35

## **JOURNEYING TO MOAB**

The Book of Ruth begins, "Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem-judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons. And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem-judah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there. And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons. And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years. And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband."—Ruth 1:1-5

One suggested lesson for us based upon the foregoing narrative is that Elimelech's departure from Bethlehem demonstrated his lack of faith in God to provide for his needs during the famine, even though other Israelites remained in the land during this difficult time. We are reminded that for ourselves, faith will manifest itself in the demonstration of love and obedience towards God. This thought is confirmed elsewhere in the Bible, where we read the following about true faith: "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born [begotten] of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." (I John 5:3,4) Presently, many of the Lord's people in various parts of the world live under difficult economic circumstances. While Christians need to provide for their families, they should be very wary of moving away into a godless environment, such as Elimelech did by moving to Moab. We need to have faith that our bread and water are sure even if circumstances may seem to impact our temporal well-being, and we should remain close to other believers for needed fellowship.—Isa. 33:16; Heb. 10:24,25

## **A TIME FOR DECISION MAKING**

After the death of her sons as well as her husband, Naomi learned that the famine in Bethlehem had ended, and she made plans to return to Judah. She also advised her daughters-in-law that the wisest course for them would be to remain in Moab and remarry. This surely must have been an emotional occasion as the three of them wept together. They

had developed a close relationship, and both Ruth and Orpah had a deep bond with their mother-in-law. Nevertheless, Naomi, who had determined she would return to Bethlehem, pleaded with them to follow her advice and stay in Moab, because she was very concerned for their welfare.—Ruth 1:6-15

In our own lives, there are many situations where our virtue or courage may be tested. For example, in our personal associations, are we able to separate ourselves from others when we believe it is God's will for us to move in a different direction? It should be our desire to fulfill in our hearts the spirit of love and righteousness and to consider what actions would be most pleasing to God. We have liberty in Christ, but that does not mean we are free to do as we please without possible repercussions. It is essential that we seek scriptural guidelines to determine if what we wish to do is merely gratifying our flesh or not. The Apostle Paul wrote: "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." (I Cor. 10:31) It takes courage to apply a passage such as this to our life's activities, especially when our flesh might desire to take a different course. Orpah, although she was attached to Naomi and loved her greatly, desired to have security in her life. She felt the cost of journeying with her mother-in-law to a new land would not be in her best interest. Accordingly, she kissed Naomi and remained in Moab.

Ruth's expressed desire after Orpah's departure reflects her devotion to the Heavenly Father. "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be

my people, and thy God, my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.” (Ruth 1:16,17) During the years they knew each other in Moab, Ruth undoubtedly observed Naomi’s faith in Jehovah and his promises to Israel, probably both by word and example. Ruth was a Moabite, but when she said that Naomi’s God would be her God and that she was willing to die where Naomi would die, she must have had some knowledge of the divine purposes concerning Israel. As a result, she was willing to commit herself to being associated with God’s specially chosen people for the rest of her life.

As consecrated Christians today, do we have a deep understanding of and appreciation for God’s plan and his kingdom that will bless all the families of the earth? Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, are we committed to the doing of his will at any cost? If that is true of us, then we should have no hesitation in pressing down upon “the mark for the prize of the high calling.” (Phil. 3:13,14) Let us realize, however, that such a commitment on our part requires constant diligence in studying God’s Word, and seeking the edification which comes from fellowship with others who likewise have assurance of God’s character and his eternal purpose for the church and the world.

## **ARRIVAL IN BETHLEHEM**

“Naomi had a kinsman of her husband’s, a mighty man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech; and his name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and

glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter.”  
—Ruth 2:1,2

Here we note the introduction of Boaz, a wealthy relative of Naomi’s husband who remained in Bethlehem while Elimelech took his family into Moab. The Mosaic Law indicated that farmers should not fully harvest their fields, but they were to leave some grain behind so the poor and needy could glean in order to obtain food. (Lev. 19:9,10) Ruth took advantage of this provision and entered a portion of the field owned by Boaz in order to gather barley for Naomi and herself. When Boaz arrived from Bethlehem, he inquired who Ruth was, and was told she was Naomi’s daughter-in-law.—Ruth 2:3-6

Boaz introduced himself to Ruth, and spoke these words to her: “Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens: Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them: have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee? and when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn.” (vss. 8,9) Ruth thanked Boaz for his kindness. He was so impressed with her devotion to Naomi that he invited Ruth to eat with his workers and also directed them to leave some extra grain in the fields for her to glean.—vss. 10-16

## **A LESSON IN DILIGENCE**

Ruth demonstrated patience and diligence, in that being young and energetic, she was content to engage in gleaning in the harvest fields to secure handfuls of grain that were left by those who were

reaping. Daily she cheerfully labored, providing food for herself and her mother-in-law, Naomi, with no obvious indication that her future prospects were going to change into something more favorable.

For the consecrated, especially those who are young, employed in terms of day to day activities and the need to make a living, often under stressful and difficult circumstances, Ruth's example suggests some practical advice. Do not be overly concerned that you do not have an abundance. The Heavenly Father has promised to supply all our needs, although we are expected to be diligent in securing them to the best of our ability, and also to distinguish needs from wants. "Be not therefore anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Where-withal shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the Gentiles seek; for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." (Matt.6:31,32, *Revised Version*) Let us focus instead upon the eternal riches of God, as opposed to the temporal good things of this world, considering the example of those, such as Moses and others, who have so walked. (Heb. 11:24-27) We are stewards of all that the Lord has provided for us. Let us be content, although not idle, concerning the business of this world, not becoming filled with anxiety. Most importantly, let us be especially diligent in doing the Heavenly Father's business, remembering that he who called us will never forsake us if we do not forsake his ways.—Heb. 13:5

## **RENDERING PRAISE FOR GOD'S GOODNESS**

As the narrative records, Ruth had gathered a large amount of barley. She brought it home to

Naomi, who thankfully gave praise to God for his goodness. "Her mother in law said unto her, Where hast thou gleaned to day? and where wroughtest thou? blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee. And she shewed her mother in law with whom she had wrought, and said, The man's name with whom I wrought to day is Boaz. And Naomi said unto her daughter in law, Blessed be he of the LORD, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead."—Ruth 2:19,20

Christian believers also should reflect upon divine goodness. One aspect of this trait is that which evokes praise and gratitude for God's blessings. "Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Sion: and unto thee shall the vow be performed." (Ps. 65:1) This verse should be filled with meaning for us, as it refers to the praise rendered now by those having made a vow of consecration to the Lord, and to the future prospect, if faithful, of praising God as divine beings, "in Sion." Many such promises are set forth in the Scriptures for the body of Christ who prove faithful unto death in following our Master's example. (Rom. 2:7; II Pet. 1:4; Rev. 3:21) What a glorious hope is ours, for if faithful in obtaining the high reward of immortality, we shall have the capacity for rendering perpetual adoration to the Creator of the universe in a manner far beyond our present abilities.

## **THOUGHTFUL COUNSEL**

Naomi was ever mindful of Ruth's personal, loving commitment to her. She also desired that her daughter-in-law should enjoy security and companionship. Thus, Naomi began to counsel Ruth as to



how she might develop a relationship with Boaz towards such a goal. “My daughter, should I not seek rest for you, that it may be well with you? Is not Boaz our relative, with whose young women you were? See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. Wash therefore and anoint yourself, and put on your cloak and go down to the threshing floor, but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. But when he lies down, observe the place where he lies. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down, and he will tell you what to do.”—Ruth 3:1-4, *English Standard Version*

Lest it be concluded that Naomi was proposing something immoral to her daughter-in-law, nothing in the narrative implies such a suggestion. It should be remembered that it was a result of Naomi’s being a living witness to godly principles that inspired Ruth to forsake Moab’s idolatrous environment and devote her life to following the God of Israel. Through her consistent example, as well as her knowledge of Boaz’ noble character, Naomi’s advice to Ruth reminds us of the following Scripture: “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.”—Eph. 4:29

As a consideration for believers today, we may at times need to rely upon the counsel of others who have demonstrated spiritual maturity as to the proper course to take in dealing with issues that impact our lives. Elders in the church can provide guidance as to how we can make sound decisions that would prove pleasing to God. This is an important reason that brethren are admonished to

follow closely Scriptural guidelines when electing such servants.—I Tim. 3:1-7

## **BASIS FOR MAKING JUDGMENTS**

Ruth followed Naomi's counsel and went to the threshing floor in the evening. "When Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits, he went over to lie down at the far end of the grain pile. Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down. In the middle of the night something startled the man, and he turned and discovered a woman lying at his feet. Who are you? he asked. I am your servant Ruth, she said. Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer. The Lord bless you, my daughter, he replied. 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."—Ruth 3:7-13, *New International Version*

In the foregoing interaction, Ruth identified herself and made a simple request. In humility she presented herself as Boaz' servant and desired that he take her as his wife. Boaz' response seems to reflect the terminology used by the Heavenly Father concerning his relationship to Israel. "I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your

nakedness. I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Sovereign LORD, and you became mine.” (Ezek. 16:8, *NIV*) As the deceased father-in-law of Ruth, Elimelech had the right to have his family name carried on, and according to the Law, Boaz had a responsibility to marry Ruth and provide children to continue the family line. Boaz apparently was much older than Ruth and perhaps at first did not envision the possibility of marriage with her. Additionally, another positive aspect of Ruth’s character was emphasized in that she based her attraction to Boaz more on respect than on physical appearance, as is often the case.

Here again we may take lessons for application in our Christian walk. Ruth’s attitude toward Boaz calls to mind events a few generations later, when God’s choice of David to be the successor to King Saul was not made based upon outward appearances. (I Sam.16:7) Thus, we also should expect that the selection of the members of the body of Christ would be based upon inner heart qualities.—I Cor. 1:26-28

A wise and faithful servant of God made the following observation in this connection. “Our Lord Jesus was disesteemed of his brethren, and when the suggestion was made that he should be the Lord’s anointed, his people hid, as it were, their faces from him—disdained him, despised him, and considered him hopeless in respect to anything great or glorious,—‘as a root out of dry ground.’ The same has been true respecting the members of his body, the true elect church; they also have been despised and rejected of men, and of them the Apostle declares, We are counted the filth and offscouring of the world; we are counted fools all the day long

for Christ's sake. (I Cor. 4:13) Again he declares that 'not many great, not many wise, not many learned, hath God chosen; but chiefly the poor of this world, rich in faith, to be heirs of the kingdom.' And this principle of the divine selection of things that are not [esteemed amongst men], to bring to naught the things that are [esteemed by men], is noticeable all throughout this Gospel age."—Reprints, page 3226

### **THE NEARER KINSMAN**

On the morning following Boaz' conversation with Ruth, he began to fulfill his promise to her. "Then went Boaz up to the gate, and sat him down there: and, behold, the kinsman of whom Boaz spake came by; unto whom he said, Ho, such a one! turn aside, sit down here. And he turned aside, and sat down. And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, Sit ye down here. And they sat down. And he said unto the kinsman, Naomi, that is come again out of the country of Moab, selleth a parcel of land, which was our brother Elimelech's: And I thought to advertise thee, saying, Buy it before the inhabitants, and before the elders of my people. If thou wilt redeem it, redeem it: but if thou wilt not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know: for there is none to redeem it beside thee; and I am after thee. And he said, I will redeem it."—Ruth 4:1-4

Although the nearer kinsman was willing to purchase Naomi's land, Boaz added the stipulation that he also would be required to marry Ruth. (Deut. 25:5) However, the nearer kinsman was unwilling to do this. He may have had sons entitled to receive their inheritance of his present property, and should

he and Ruth have children in the future, it might cause complications regarding who should receive various portions of his estate. (Ruth 4:5,6) Thus, in view of this kinsman's relinquishing any claim to redeem the land as well as marry Ruth, Boaz was now able to take Ruth to be his wife.—vss. 7-14

As a final admonition for us as believers we might consider the element of patience which was required by Boaz to have Ruth become his wife. At no stage of our Christian career do we want to spend too much time thinking or imagining things that could make us weary in well doing or impatient with our present state. The Bible is a textbook, and in it is godly counsel that we need to continually apply in our lives. In addition to prayers, meditation, study and fellowshiping with our brethren, we should wait upon the Lord for direction in our lives so that we can take appropriate action towards realizing our heart's desire relative to God's kingdom which will bless the human family.—Ps. 27:14; 130:5

If we continue to feed upon the precious promises of Scripture, it will help to negate feelings of weariness, impatience or even doubts concerning our continued earthly sojourn. The Apostle Paul knew the brethren would experience these things and recorded the following admonition. "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise."—Heb. 10:35,36

May the character lessons found in this Old Testament narrative involving Naomi, Ruth and Boaz help to inspire us to greater faithfulness in our walk towards becoming a part of the bride of Christ. ■