



Learn Your Bible

Resources to help you learn and understand the Bible

Short Study 081: Ruth

Study Author: Michael Button

Read Ruth 1:1-5

Introduction: This short Book has rich content in its four chapters, comprising tragedy, devotion, love and romance, in a historical context which is an example of God's sovereignty to bring good out of disaster (see Romans 8:28).

1. The background. The opening verses you read explain how the Moabite woman (Ruth) came to be in Judah. With Bible aids or the Internet find out the geographical location of Moab and identify the relationship between Moabites and Israelites. Where did Naomi and Ruth settle? (1:22). For Ruth's devotion to her mother-in-law, see the exchange in 1:6-18.

2. The "chance" encounter. Ruth supported Naomi and herself by gleaning in the field of a wealthy farmer, named Boaz. What was gleaning and why do you think Ruth was having to do this (see Leviticus 19:9-10)? Boaz took an immediate liking to Ruth (2:8-16), which did not go unnoticed to Naomi, who saw here an opportunity for matchmaking (3:1-6), especially since Boaz was a near relative of her late husband and would thereby have a right or obligation to marry his son's widow. Read about this so-called *Levirate Marriage* in Deut 25:5-10. (It looks as if the law of Levirate Marriage was being extended to other near relatives, not just to actual brothers living together.)

3. The marriage. Naomi's ruse worked. Ruth asked Boaz if he would be her 'kinsman-redeemer'¹, i.e. the one who would marry the deceased relative's widow. He readily agreed, but could do so only if someone who was more closely related to Ruth's late husband was willing to waive his right to the family estate, which would incur the obligation to marry Ruth (3:12-13). Following the procedure laid down by law (Deut 25:5-10), Boaz met with the relative and ten city elders at the city gate (the traditional place for civil and legal settlements) The relative was unwilling to take on the responsibility of marrying Ruth (read 4:1-6) (no doubt to Boaz' delight!). The custom of handing over one sandal as a token of handing over a right of entitlement was carried out (4:7-10), and Boaz was free to marry Ruth.

4. The outcome. The marriage took place (4:13) and, in due course, Boaz and Ruth had a son, whom they named *Obed* (4:17). Obed was the grandfather of none other than the highly acclaimed King David (4:22). Even more highly acclaimed, however, was the *Son of David* some eleven centuries later (Matthew 1:1). Thus a Moabitess features in the genealogy of our Lord.

To think about: Do tragedies and misfortunes mean that God's purposes will not be fulfilled in our lives?

To dig deeper: Read through the Book slowly, identifying any remarks and actions that reveal the personalities of the leading characters.

¹ The NKJV and some other English Bible versions paraphrase this as *close relative*.