

Ruth

During the tumultuous and divided times of the Judges of Israel, the events of the Book of Ruth took place. There was a man named Elimelech who had two sons. Elimelech soon died, leaving his wife Naomi without a husband and their two sons without a father. Some time later, the two sons also died, leaving their wives alone along with Naomi. So begins the journey of Naomi and the events which brought meaning back into her life.

After the death of her two sons, Naomi urged the newly widowed daughter-in-laws to return to their home town where they could be taken care of and remarry. One, succumbing to Naomi's advice, left for home, but the other, Ruth, would not leave. She would go wherever Naomi's wanderings would take her. Be it for better or worse. Naomi tried to discourage Ruth from this action. She let flow a dialectic of depression, testifying as to how bad off any young woman would be if they followed her. She said, "Why would you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands" and "...it is harder for me than for you, for the hand of the Lord has gone forth against me" (Ruth 1: 11b, 13b). Thus was the emotional condition of Naomi.

As bad as the situation appeared, God was on the scene. Ruth was accompanying Naomi and they both sojourned safely to Bethlehem. Of course, to Naomi none of this was on the forefront of her mind. She was still bitter inside. So much so that she wanted to change her name. She told her acquaintances of Bethlehem, "Do not call me Naomi (pleasant); call me Mara (bitter), for the Lord has dealt very bitterly with me" (Ruth 1: 20). While Naomi was sulking, Ruth decided to make herself useful and go to work in the grain fields. By God's grace, she just so happened to find work in the fields of Boaz, a close relative of Naomi. Boaz, who had heard of her loyalty to Naomi, immediately cared deeply for her. He provided her a safe place to work, food, and preferential treatment. This in turn provided for Naomi's needs. Already God had provided a job, food, and friends. However, God would not stop there.

Once Naomi learned that Ruth was gleaning from Boaz's fields, she immediately began planning their wedding. She instructed Ruth in the customary procedures concerning such a courtship and sent her on her way to perform them. Amazing! A day ago, she was a pouting worrywart. Now she was a woman with a mission: to see that Ruth was well cared for. Boaz gladly accepted Ruth's proposition but still needed to take care of the legalities of the matter. This was a stressful time for Ruth. For if there was a relative closer than Boaz (which there was), that man would have the legal right to marry Ruth first. It was during this time that Naomi is again spurred to be a helpmate to Ruth. She assures her, "Wait, my daughter, until you know how the matter turns out; for the man will not rest until he has settled it today" (Ruth 3: 18). That same day Boaz did indeed settle the matter. He met with the closer kinsman, discussed the issue, and received the right to redeem the family name, inheritance, and to marry Ruth! Naomi had succeeded in her mission. God's providence and wisdom had manifested itself. Ruth needed Naomi. Naomi needed Ruth. God saw to it that they would be together, not as mother-in-law and daughter-in-law but, rather, as mother and daughter uplifting and caring one for another. Later, Ruth would give birth to a son, Obed. He would be the father of Jesse, the father of King David. Naomi acted as nurse to Obed. Naomi was chosen to provide care and love to an ancestor of the Christ!

God's constant care and provision can be difficult to discern, especially during times of hardship. Naomi found herself in need and great sorrow. She blamed her troubles on God. She felt her pleasantness being drained, and in its stead allowed bitterness to rise. Nevertheless, God was faithful to Naomi. Ruth became her reason to live with purpose,

Boaz, a kinsman redeemer, and God...the restorer of her joy. Once again, she would live up to the name Naomi!