

Boaz and Ruth: Firm Foundations



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Ruth 1–4.*

Memory Text: “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” (*Ruth 1:16, 17, NIV*).

From the Fall in Eden to the mark of the beast at the end of the world, Scripture portrays a pretty grim picture of humanity. The Word of God does not gloss over the human condition. From one end of the Bible to the other, humanity is portrayed for what it is.

In the midst of all this sits the book of Ruth and the handful of characters there—people of courage, conviction, faith, loyalty, and selflessness. Where did these folk come from?

The refreshing relationship of Boaz and Ruth appears in stark contrast to the period of the judges in which the story is set, a time when there was no king and everybody did what they wanted. Yet, Ruth, a Moabite, demonstrates supreme devotion to her bereaved mother-in-law and to the God of the Israelites; Boaz, meanwhile, shows consistent goodness. Though life had thrown so many hurdles in the way, the story of Ruth illustrates how a right attitude can overcome odds.

The Week at a Glance: In Boaz and Ruth we can see many features that make a good foundation for a successful marriage and for a faithful life in general.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 18.*

Family Affairs

Sometimes we can find goodness, faith, dedication, and selflessness in the most unexpected places. The family relations shown in the book of Ruth could have easily gone sour. Instead, they give us something to emulate.

Read Ruth 1 and, based on what you read, answer the following questions:

1. What parallel is found here with some earlier Bible characters?
Ruth 1:1; compare with Gen. 12:10, 26:1.

2. What evidence of the good family relations between everyone involved do you find in Ruth 1? How were these good relations manifested?

3. Read Naomi's words in Ruth 1:8, 15, 20, 21. What do these texts tell us about her?

This must have been some kind of family: a Hebrew mother-in-law to two “pagan” daughters-in-law wouldn’t, on the surface, seem to form a great relationship. It had all the earmarks for disaster.

And yet, the dedication to each other’s well-being is phenomenal. We don’t know all that went on in their homes, but they obviously had something that many homes certainly could use.

How faithful and loyal are you to those around you? What can you do in order to think less of self and more about the good of others?

I Have to Teach Tomorrow . . .

► **Key Text:** *Ruth 1:16, 17*

► **Teach the Class to:**

Know: Christ is our nearest Kin-Redeemer.

Feel: The joy of being saved by the Kin-Redeemer.

Do: Determine to have a full spiritual life.

► **Lesson Outline:**

I. Famine (*Ruth 1*)

A Ruth belongs to a race begun in incest. Yet, she is honored as the great-grandmother of David and a direct ancestor of Jesus. What hope does this give us, that no matter how far we've fallen, Jesus can graft us back in?

B Naomi and her family leave their land to escape famine, little realizing that they would be such effective missionaries. While we may not serve God in a foreign country, how may we minister to those around us?

II. Plenty (*Ruth 2*)

A God brings Boaz and Ruth together. Why does this give us hope that God will lead us to the person He has for us if we will trust in Him?

B Listen to the report about Ruth that the overseer gives Boaz: She works “without resting even for a moment” (*RSV*). She is the first to go back to the field after her meal and the last to leave work. She even saves a portion of her dinner for Naomi, showing concern for her mother-in-law. How can we be more like Ruth?

III. Redemption (*Ruth 3:8–10*)

A Ruth goes to the threshing floor and lifts up Boaz's garment, which literally means “thy wing.” How does God shelter us with His grace to redeem us?

B Boaz tells Ruth there is “a kinsman closer than I” who has a stronger claim to redeem her. He tells her to wait; obediently she lies down at his feet for the night. In what way does Ruth's trust in Boaz show us how we should wait at the feet of Jesus for Him to redeem us, despite delays?

C Naomi changes her name to Mara, which means “bitterness.” But Ruth gives Naomi a son (grandson), Obed, and gives her Boaz, a son-in-law. Has God changed bitterness or loss into a blessing in your life?

► **Summary:** Christ, our nearest of kin, redeems us as His lost possessions.

Devotion of Ruth

Based on Ruth 1, what can we know about the character of Ruth? What evidence do we have that she believed in the God of Israel?

Ruth's dedication to her mother-in-law was powerful. Orpah's turning back possibly made Ruth's decision to stick by her mother-in-law more difficult. Naomi pointed to her and said, "[She's] going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her" (*Ruth 1:15, NIV*). That is when Ruth made her famous statement about wanting to be part of the people of Israel. Obviously, she saw something in those people and in their God that attracted her. All this despite the fact that Naomi herself doesn't appear to be an openly aggressive evangelist.

What evidence do we see here of just how, on one level, Naomi wasn't a good witness for the Lord?

Regardless of the problems, in Ruth we see a Moabite who sought to be part of Israel, even though the Israelites were to be more accepting of Edomites and Egyptians than of Moabites. Edomite and Egyptian great-grandchildren (the third generation) might be allowed into the assembly of the Lord (*Deut. 23:7, 8*). But no descendant of any Ammonite or Moabite could enter the Lord's assembly, even down to the tenth generation (*vs. 3*). However, this is not a prohibition against ever marrying one of them, nor is it an exclusion of them from salvation. Ruth adopts Naomi's God as her very own, and in return God shows her His favor in many ways.

Look at your own life, your own church, your own relationships to others and to the Lord. What, if anything, is there that would cause others to be drawn to your church and to your God? What does your answer tell you about yourself and your church? Discuss your response in class on Sabbath.

Learning Cycle

► STEP 1—Motivate!

Just for Teachers: Step 1 of the Natural Learning Cycle links the learners' experiences to the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, *Why is this lesson important to me?*

The narrative of Boaz and Ruth serves as a model of exemplary marital relations and as a practical allegory of Christ's love for humanity, whom He has married to Himself through the gospel (*Jer. 3:14, Matt. 22:2*).

Scientists conducted an experiment with two dogs. Both were of the same breed, age, weight, and temperament. Each dog was kept separate from the other; yet, both were given identical living conditions, diets, and exercise regimens. The only difference was that the first dog was treated by its handlers in a detached manner. Never cruel or harsh to the animal, they were just impersonal and businesslike. On the other hand, the second dog was given affection. How do you suppose both animals fared? The dog who received *proper* care minus love became dejected and withdrawn. Its appetite and health declined, whereas the other dog thrived. Researchers concluded that love is indispensable to emotional and physical health.

Consider This: Think of two contrasting relationships in your life in which the truth of these principles was exemplified in one way or another. How have these relationships affected your life and treatment of others?

► STEP 2—Explore!

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle presents information learners can use to help them better understand the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, *What do I need to know from God's Word?*

Bible Commentary

I & II. Family Affairs: Devotion of Ruth (*Ruth 1*)

The opening chapter of Ruth suggests that the family relations between Naomi and her two daughters-in-law were warm and harmonious. These young widows had both “dealt kindly” with Naomi, a widowed Jewish expatriate to Moab. While Orpah's love for Naomi was sincere, it lacked spiritual depth. She had never yielded her heart to the God of Israel—the

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Boaz

So far we've seen numerous things in Ruth that show her to be a person of good character, faithfulness, and dedication.

But, as we know, it takes two to make a couple. Hence, Boaz now enters the story.

Read Ruth 2:1–12. What can we learn here about the character of Boaz? What points stand out about him?

When Boaz found out who the young woman gleaning in his fields was, he did several thoughtful things. He (1) gave her full encouragement to glean in his fields, (2) provided for her peace of mind by informing her that the men had been instructed not to bother her, (3) provided for her further needs by making his drinking water available for her, and (4) gave her spiritual encouragement.

Read James 2:14–17. In what ways do we see the principles James expressed manifested here by Boaz? What lesson is in here for us?

Boaz further tried not to make Ruth feel as if she were a beggar (*Ruth 2:13–23*). At mealtime he invited her to join his harvesters for bread and a relish made with vinegar and even gave her enough roasted grain so that there were leftovers. He instructed his men not to embarrass her even if she gleaned among the tied sheaves, and he even told them to deliberately remove stalks of grain from the sheaves and leave them for her. The amount that Ruth took home was more than could be gained through hard work. It testified to generosity. Finally, Boaz invited her to spend the rest of the harvest days in his fields.

How often a kind word can make such a difference in a person's life! How quick are you to give praise and affirmation to those around you? Be stingy with criticism; be generous in affirmation.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Lord of Creation. Ruth, on the other hand, had embraced the faith of Judah. Though pagan by birth, she was an Israelite by spiritual adoption. This prompted her magnificent words given in the memory text (*Ruth 1:16, 17*). Ruth begged Naomi to desist from urging her to remain in her own country and return to its customs. She had walked in the light of the gospel too long now for heathen darkness to have any appeal to her. She was joyfully willing to forsake her country and familiar associations of early life to follow God and pursue her divinely appointed destiny (*see Luke 5:11, 14:33*).

Consider This: Compare Ruth’s reply to Naomi with the appeal of Cleopas and his companion to Christ in *Luke 24:28, 29*. What did Ruth see in Naomi that made her desire to worship as a true Jew? What did Cleopas and his friend see in Christ (whose true identity they did not yet recognize) that made them prevail on Him to tarry with them for the night? (*Luke 24:30–35*).


III. Boaz (*Ruth 2*)

Boaz’s name means “in him is strength.” He came as one mighty to redeem Ruth from her lonely, impoverished widowhood and from her status as an alien in Judah. He was mighty in compassion, kindness, decency, and graciousness. The parallels between Boaz’s love for Ruth and Christ’s love for His church are delightful and compelling.

Consider This: Jesus came as “one mighty to save” (*Isa. 63:1*). How did He exhibit that might? How did the manifestation of His restorative power and grace affect the grateful recipients of His care?

IV. The Proposal

In keeping with the customs of that era, Ruth’s coming to Boaz at night (*Ruth 3:1–7*) bore no taint of impropriety. It is moving to consider her humble yet unwavering confidence in his goodwill toward her. Ruth learned from Naomi that through marriage they were kin to Boaz. This kinship opened an avenue of opportunity for Ruth to become his wife or, at least, for Naomi to regain her lost possession through his assistance (*see Lev. 25:25, 48, 49*). Ruth complied with Naomi’s instructions. She approached Boaz in a spirit of undemanding supplication. At first alarmed by Ruth’s nocturnal visit to his tent, and lying down at his feet, Boaz quickly understood her purpose when she explained the familial tie

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The Proposal

Read Ruth 3. What noble traits of character are revealed in all the actions of the people involved? In what ways were these traits revealed in the life of Jesus?

If there's one thing about the Bible that should be clear to us, it is that it takes place in a cultural context. Whatever the grand and eternal truths God teaches us through His Word, they come to us through people who live and function in their own culture—a culture that at times can seem very strange to those who live in other cultures.

What cultural things are revealed in this chapter that are strange to your own culture?

Though it was in the darkness of the night, the proposal had the potential to be very embarrassing for Ruth. She could have been spied by someone, and stories might have spread. Boaz might have refused her request. But Boaz immediately showed his thoughtfulness by trying to put her at ease. He acted as though she was doing him a favor by choosing him instead of some younger man. He then promised to do all that she asked. Finally, he sent her back to Naomi laden with food. He also went out of his way to protect her from any false accusations that might have come from her visit to him.

Go back through Ruth 3 again and look at the different character traits revealed there by Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz. How well do you manifest these traits in your own life? What upcoming issues and challenges are you facing in which you need to manifest these same traits? Take some time to think through what's coming and how you can, through the grace of God, do the right thing.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

that existed between them (*Ruth 3:9*).

Consider This: What does Boaz’s reply to Ruth reveal about his character and personality? (*Ruth 3:10–13*).

V. Redemption (*Ruth 4*)

Although Ruth had a nearer kinsman than Boaz, that relative was unwilling to “mar” his “inheritance” (*vs. 6*) by making any sacrifice to improve Naomi and Ruth’s lot. He had not the least inclination to include them in his family on any basis whatsoever. He represents the spirit of self-interest and unconcern for the afflicted and destitute. But Boaz, like Christ, did not consider any price too high in order to be the protector and provider of these two women—women so noble in character, so united in the spirit of familial love, and so deeply consecrated to God.

None of us starts out in a state of ripe spirituality, but through growing contact with Christ our Kinsman-Redeemer, we become like Him and are fully enfolded into His family, not just in name but in relational union. (*See John 15:1–7, 17:20–26, Eph. 3:16–19*). Boaz paid money to redeem Naomi’s inheritance; whereas, Christ redeemed us from our lost state by paying the price with His suffering and blood. But Boaz did more than pay redemption money; he freely gave Ruth his heart of loving affection and was to Naomi a “restorer” of life and a “nourisher of her old age” (*Ruth 4:14, 15*).


God rewarded the faith of all these grace-filled people by giving Ruth and Boaz a happy marriage and crowned them with His loving favor by making them the forebears of King David and of Jesus Himself. Truly, Christ was in them, the hope of glory. What an inspiring model for Christian marriage and home life!

► STEP 3—Practice!

Just for Teachers: This step of the learning cycle will assist you in helping your class members find the answer to the following question: **How can I practice the information I just learned?**

Thought Questions:

- 1 The world presents Christians with many opportunities to go back into

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Redemption

Read Ruth 4. What ultimately came of this marriage between a Jew and a non-Jew?

Redemption is perhaps the most important theme in the book of Ruth. In various forms the Hebrew word occurs more than twenty-three times in these four chapters. Boaz fulfills the role of redeemer for Naomi and her deceased husband and son. David, the notable descendant, later proved to be the redeemer of Israel's fortunes lost after Joshua; and Jesus, a further descendant, provided redemption for the entire humanity (*Gal. 4:5, 1 Pet. 1:18, Rev. 5:9*).

What were the duties of a kinsman-redeemer? *Lev. 25:25, 47–49; Num. 36:8, 9; Deut. 25:5, 6.*

The custom of a male relative marrying the deceased's widow to raise up an inheritance existed in other countries of the ancient Near East. Deuteronomy 25:5 specifies that in Israel this practice applied just to brothers living together. Judah attempted to get his second son to follow this practice. Boaz did not qualify under the provisions of Deuteronomy 25, but it is apparent that extensions of this principle were practiced, and in order of nearness of kin.

Naomi had not sold family property, but if and when it did go up for sale, the closest relatives would have first option to buy it so as to keep it in the family. The kinsman who would redeem this also had the obligation to marry Ruth to provide an heir for Mahlon, her deceased husband.

The fulfilling of the role of redeemer had its risk. If the kinsman-redeemer had only one child, and that by Ruth, his own property would pass on in the name of Mahlon. Hence, the law allowed the nearest kin the opportunity to refuse to do what was expected of him. However, the one who refused to redeem his relative's property and name had to undergo a humiliating ceremony (*see Deut. 25:7–10*).

As said earlier, the Bible unfolds within a particular cultural context that can often be hard for those in other cultures to understand fully. All that being said, what universal principles regarding family obligations that should apply to us and our family relationships can we find here? How well are you fulfilling those obligations?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

carnal darkness. What forms do those opportunities take, and how is their false allurements extinguished in the life of the believer? (*John 8:12, Gal. 5:5–26, Heb. 11:13–16, 1 John 1:7–9*).

2 How is intimacy with God cultivated?

Application Question:

Review the qualities of Ruth's character exhibited by her words and behavior. How does our deportment affect our influence and prospects in life?

Witnessing

Whether married or single, how does beauty of character and graciousness of behavior affect your influence for the gospel?

Consider This: What traits do you possess that do not rightly represent Christ? How important is it to you that these traits be changed by the transforming touch of God's grace?

► STEP 4—Apply!

Just for Teachers: In this fourth and final step of the Natural Learning Cycle, you will want to encourage class members to make a life response to the lesson. Help them to answer this question, **With God's help, what can I do with what I have learned from this lesson?**

Read Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 334–342 (on speech and influence). Consider what these pages have to say about our personal influence and how others are affected by what we are, for good or evil. It is not by contemplating our faults and shortcomings that we are transformed into Christ's image but by reverently beholding Him.

How can you find more time to "behold Him"? Act on these findings.

Take time to communicate with and serve more compassionately and bountifully those who are part of your life.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Compatibility,” pp. 83–86, in *The Adventist Home*.

In the beginning of the story, the odds of Ruth ending up marrying Boaz were indeed minuscule. Many “circumstantial” events were necessary to lead to their eventual meeting and marriage. (1) There had to be a famine in Judah, else the family of Elimelech would not have left Bethlehem. (2) They had to choose Moab rather than some other country for refuge, such as Egypt or Edom, in order to come in contact with Ruth. (3) There had to be eligible bachelors in Naomi’s family to marry Ruth. (4) The male had to die in order for Ruth to be eligible for a second marriage. (5) The famine in Judah had to end so that Naomi could consider going back. (6) Ruth had to decide to accompany Naomi. (7) Ruth had to happen to glean in the field of Boaz.

In the end, the Bible consistently presents the picture that the hand of God is over all and that all that happens is with divine foreknowledge. For those who love God and put Him first, all things work together for their ultimate good (*Rom. 8:28*). This story is indeed a great example of that principle.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Look at Naomi’s reaction in Ruth 1:19–21. Compare it to her words in Ruth 2:20. Why is this such a common reaction? What’s wrong, however, with her “theology”?
- ❷ As a class, discuss your answers to Tuesday’s last question. What do your answers tell you about yourself and your church? What things in your church would draw people to it? What things would push people away? What practical things need to be changed in order to make your church something that would draw others to it and to the God you represent? How can you as a class help to start implementing the needed changes?
- ❸ As a class, talk about your own culture and how it deals with family relationships. What things in your culture work toward strengthening those relationships? What things work against it? What can you do to help others better understand their obligations to family members?

Summary: Despite some aspects of their situation not being ideal for marriage, Boaz and Ruth had the essential qualities for a solid relationship. Both demonstrated a spirit of caring and sharing, and both were deeply committed to God.