

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?

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.

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.

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.

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. 35:18, 19; 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?

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.

No Matter What

How much does your faith mean to you? To James Cherogony of Kenya, it means everything. And though he is just 20 years old, already his faith has cost him 3 years of his life.

James was a top student at a secondary school in Kenya when a fellow student introduced James to the Seventh-day Adventist faith. James joined his friend in worship and soon gave his life to the Lord.

As graduation neared, the students prepared for the national exams. To score well on these exams meant a chance to study at a quality university and prepare for the future. James was not sure what he would study. He could excel in a number of areas.

But when exam dates were posted, two of his exams fell on the Sabbath. He went to the headmaster and explained that he was a Seventh-day Adventist and would not take the exams on Sabbath. But instead of helping him, the school suspended him. When James's parents learned what had happened, they were angry. They refused to intervene with the school to help James take the last two exams.

James had completed every requirement for graduation except those two exams, but now he would have to repeat at least a year of high school and retake the exams in order to graduate. But his parents refused to pay for another year of tuition. For two years James stayed at home, working to help the family, reading widely, writing letters, and seeking to find a secondary school that did not require Sabbath class attendance or Sabbath exams.

Then James learned of an Adventist secondary school attached to the Adventist-owned University of Eastern Africa in Baraton, Kenya. There he could complete his studies and take his exams. Thrilled, James applied for admission and was accepted. Government regulations made James repeat more than his final year of secondary school, but James is not deterred.

Through his trials, James has remained a faithful Seventh-day Adventist Christian, letting his faith shine as a light to his family and friends. His parents have seen how much James's faith means to him, and they no longer trouble him about the missed exams and lost years.

James is determined that no matter what, he will not give up his faith in God. Your mission offerings help young people such as James receive the education they need in an environment that affirms and strengthens their faith.

JAMES CHEROGONY lives in Kenya. He is completing his secondary school and hopes to study toward a career of service to God.