

Zoom Sunday 11 October: The story of Ruth

The Old Testament books of Joshua and Judges have been full of details about battles and killings, so it is rather a nice surprise to discover that book eight is a 'happily ever after' story. Although written during the time of the 'judges', it doesn't even mention battles!

Of course the story doesn't start happily. It begins with a drought in Israel which caused a family to move to the land of Moab. Sadly while they were there, the husband and his two grown-up sons died.

In Bible days there were no pension schemes and no life insurance so life was tough for widows like Naomi and her daughters in law. Naomi decided she would get more help back in her old home in Israel, Bethlehem so she planned to leave Moab. She told her daughters-in-law to go back to their families so they could organise for their daughters to remarry.

Ruth, however, insisted on sticking with Naomi so she could look after her. She didn't want to go back to the old ways and old gods of Moab; she knew about the God of Israel now. Ruth looked after Naomi well and the people in Bethlehem noticed this and approved of her, even though she was a foreigner.

In order to get food for the two of them, Ruth went out to glean in the fields at harvest time. God's law (Lev 19:9, 10) made it clear that, when farmers reaped their fields, they were not to pick up every scrap but were to leave some unpicked crops for the poor to pick up. The poor families were allowed to 'glean' the fields when the harvesters were finished.

God brought Ruth to work in the fields of Boaz. He was a godly man who made sure that his workers always did the right thing. He noticed how hard Ruth worked, found out more about her and then took her under his wing. He went far beyond God's written laws

In those days people often had more than one wife and the closest living relative of the dead husband was expected to marry his widow. Naomi was too old to remarry, but she encouraged Ruth to hint to Boaz (who was related to her husband) that he might become Ruth's second husband. Despite the fact that he liked her, Boaz pointed out that he was not the closest relative. This complicated things, but Boaz promised to see what he could do.

The leading men from Bethlehem used to sit at the gates of the city each day so that the people could bring arguments or problems to them. And that was where Boaz and the man who was more closely related to the family met. Boaz explained that Naomi was keen to sell a field, but that whoever bought it must marry and care for Ruth. This chap wasn't prepared to do that and so Boaz seized the opportunity.

And so it all ended happily. Boaz married Ruth and they had a son whom they called Obed. Naomi wasn't so sad any more as she loved nursing that little boy.

But even in this simple personal story God was at work. Obed's grandson (Ruth's great grandson) was to become the most famous king of Israel, King David.

God is part of our personal stories too. I find that amazing: that the Lord of all creation cares about me and my life, even though I am a mere speck in the universe and in time. He knows me and loves me and cares about what happens to me. And he cares about each one of us without any favouritism.

Reading

Monday: Ruth 1:1 – 9

Tuesday: Ruth 1:15 – 18

Wednesday: Ruth 2:2 - 7

Thursday: Ruth 2:8 – 13

Friday: Ruth 4:13 - 17