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RUTH

Ruth 1:1—4:17

RUTH, like Samson, is one of the prominent ancestors of the Israelites. In contrast to Samson, her story is a pleasant tale of love and devotion to family and neighbor. Understanding their roots helped many in Israel to live uprightly in accord with God's wishes.

Ruth lived in a nation that suffered much during the time of the judges. Many experienced painful hunger. Her in-laws, for example, were desperately poor and had to move with their two sons from Bethlehem of Judah to the pagan land of Moab. While there, their two sons married Moab women.

The husband and sons of her mother-in-law Naomi died. She decided to move back to Bethlehem. She wanted her two daughters-in-law to return to their families, where they might find new husbands and happiness among the Moab men.

One accepted Naomi's plan, but Ruth did not. She did not want Naomi to be alone and went with her, saying, "Your people will be my people, your God will be my God." Arriving in Bethlehem, Naomi and Ruth found conditions quite difficult. Fortunately, some landowners would allow poor people to scour their lands

after harvest. That way they could gather grains left on the ground by field hands. Ruth volunteered to go and find food for Naomi and herself. It was backbreaking and humiliating work, but it prevented starvation.

Ruth was working in the fields owned by Boaz. On an inspection tour, he noticed Ruth and admired her work and beauty. He asked his foreman about her. He then told her she was welcome to gather leftovers anytime. More-over, he told his workers to make sure there was enough grain dropped for Ruth and Naomi to survive.

Ruth told Naomi what happened. Naomi was delighted since she knew Boaz to be a distant cousin. Rather boldly, Naomi told Ruth to go back to Boaz's tent that evening, and sleep at his feet. When Boaz saw her the next day, he decided to marry Ruth.

However, a relative, according to strict law, had first right to have her in marriage. Before the elders of the city, Boaz asked his intentions about Ruth. He was not interested, so Boaz married her. They were blessed by God with a son, Obed. He would become the great-grandfather of King David.



THE VISITATION

Luke 1:39-56

WHEN Mary told Joseph about the Angel's visit, he was both confused and wary. He realized Mary was pregnant outside marriage and would be treated harshly. The law required that if a woman became pregnant outside marriage, she was to be publicly stoned to death. Joseph did not want to have Mary punished so he decided to break their engagement.

That night an Angel appeared to Joseph in a dream. He told Joseph not to be afraid to have Mary as his wife, since her Child was conceived through the power of the Holy Spirit. Also, the Son to be born of her would bring hope and salvation to God's people. Hearing this, Joseph took Mary into his home.

Amid such upheaval, Mary remembered her cousin Elizabeth was also pregnant and probably in need of help. She set out into the hill country and went to Zechariah's home in Judah. When Mary entered Zechariah's home, she called out to Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's voice, the infant leaped in her womb. Elizabeth, then filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a

loud voice, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And who am I that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy."

The words "who am I" recall the words of King David when the Ark of the Covenant was taken back to Jerusalem after its capture by the Philistines. There is a tight connection between the Old Testament and New Testament in the visit of Mary to Elizabeth. David and his people strongly believed the Ark symbolized God's presence. When Mary visited Zechariah's house to help her cousin, the home was made holy through the divine presence of the Lord in Mary's womb.

Mary replied to Elizabeth with a variety of Old Testament quotes reflecting the Messiah. Mary's words told of God's desire to open His kingdom to all people. Salvation was to be for all—not just for the higher classes, as was thought before the coming of Christ, but also for the lowly. Mary stayed three months until Elizabeth gave birth.