

Ruth 2-4

Aim of Lesson

To show how God directs the lives of godly people.

Background study

Leviticus 19:9 and 33-34; Deuteronomy 24:19; 25:5-10. Find out details about the harvest season in the Jewish agricultural year, the practices of threshing and winnowing, and the associated feasts.

Suggested outline of lesson

Remind the children of Ruth and Naomi's arrival at Bethlehem. Imagine this were happening today, and suggest how two immigrants would go about providing for themselves and how they would find food, work and somewhere to live. Then, by contrast, describe the simple agricultural way of life in Bethlehem in those days and how the two women would find food, water and shelter. Explain the custom of gleaning, and God's instructions to the Israelites to provide for the needs of the poor and of strangers.

You may like to consider using hand puppets to represent Ruth, Naomi and Boaz when recounting the dialogues of chapter two. Clearly God was with Ruth in her choice of the part of the field which belonged to Boaz, a close relative of Naomi's husband. Point out that in Israel there were no hedges, and large areas of good land were divided into strips marked by boundary stones; Boaz owned one such strip. Spend a little time introducing Boaz, a wealthy, honourable and godly man who was highly respected. His greeting to the reapers and their reply to him indicate the good relationship which he had created with his own people, and show the way in which the Lord God was acknowledged in everyday greetings.

As a foreigner Ruth could not assume that she had a right to glean so she asked the foreman for permission to do so, and then applied herself to the task. Seeing a new woman amongst the gleaners, Boaz asked his foreman who she was. Notice the good report of her hard work. Boaz was impressed by her industry and conscientiousness and touched by her devotion to his kinswoman, Naomi. He showed his concern and kindness not only by allowing her to glean in his field, as the Law required, but by providing extra grain for her to gather. In addition he gave her access to the precious water which, contrary to the usual custom, the young men drew from the well, and invited her to share the mid-day meal.

Stress Ruth's gratitude for the Boaz' generosity, and her bewilderment at his concern, since she was but a foreigner in the land. It is interesting to note that Boaz had already heard about Ruth's background. This shows us two things, namely that Ruth's lovely character and unselfish behaviour had been noticed by the people of Bethlehem, and that Boaz was a man who cared about the welfare of others. His words to her were welcoming and kindly.

Show again Ruth's concern for Naomi when, having been provided with a good portion of food at the mealtime, she had saved some to take home to the older woman. Highlight Naomi's amazement at the amount of barley her daughter-in-law had gleaned, an ephah (50 lbs.), and her joy in knowing that God had guided Ruth to the field of Boaz. Ruth continued to glean, to provide for herself and Naomi, under the protection of Boaz until the barley and wheat harvests had ended.

In continuing this story, explain that in the days in which Ruth lived marriages were arranged by parents. Therefore it was fitting that Naomi should take the initiative in providing a home and security for Ruth. Harvest being over, the winnowing of the barley had to be undertaken by Boaz and his men, and Boaz remained on the site overnight until the job was completed. Ruth obeyed her mother-in-law's instructions carefully. She washed, put on some perfume and dressed in her best clothes. She hid until Boaz was asleep, drowsy with wine. His first concern when he awoke to find a woman lying at his feet was to identify her. When Ruth pointed out his responsibilities of kinship and asked him to marry her, Boaz said she was right to have approached him and he promised to fulfil her request if possible. However, there was an even closer relative who might wish to marry her and he must be consulted first.

Boaz went to the city gate, the place where business was transacted in those days. Here he met his kinsman and wasted no time in calling him and the elders of the city together to witness what he had to say. As it did not suit the other man to take Ruth for his wife, he agreed to pass this responsibility to Boaz, and the transaction was completed with the ceremony of the sandal, a confirmation of the agreement. The happy occasion was witnessed by a crowd of people who joined the elders in warm congratulations and good wishes for the couple's future happiness. In such a close community it was natural for everyone to share occasions of great happiness or of sorrow. All the villagers had consoled Naomi when she arrived back in Bethlehem bereft of her husband and sons; now they rejoiced with her in the celebration of her much loved daughter-in-law's marriage. When, later, a son was born to Ruth and Boaz the villagers again united to express their pleasure at the restoration of the family line. The child was named Obed, which means "restoring". They were not to know that he was to become the grandfather of the great king David.

Relevance to the children's lives

We can learn a great deal about kindness from the lives of Ruth and Boaz. They thought so much about the feelings and needs of others, that it must have been a great pleasure to know them. Let us ask ourselves some searching questions. When was the last time we did something kind for someone? What are the needs of the people whom we meet, such as our parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters, teachers, friends, old people, etc? How can we show that we understand their needs and feelings?

Worksheets

These should be self-explanatory.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, we have enjoyed hearing about Naomi, Ruth and Boaz. Please help us to be kind and considerate, always careful about the needs and feelings of others. Amen.

Memory verse

"The Lord recompense you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!" (Ruth 2:12).