



Ruth

Marriage
From Heaven

Louis Nel

Marriage From Heaven

Meditations on the Book of Ruth

November 2019

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Cover: Painting by Hughes Merle
- 1876 **Ruth in the Fields**
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Foreword

Naomi is disrupted when a terrible drought hits their beloved Israel. When her husband, Elimelech breaks the news that they should leave, it is as if a heavy burden is lying on her shoulders. Not only does moving mean moving to another home or

town, but it means emigrating to another country - to the land of Moab. What would become of her two sons in that country? Where would they find their wives?

Then the worst thing that she feared, happens when they both marry Moabite girls. For Naomi, it was the end of the world!

But the worst was yet to come. Elimelech dies in the foreign land before they can retreat to their own land. Her two sons both died soon after, and now Naomi is sitting with only two pagan daughters-in-law and without any grandchildren to carry on the offspring. She's destitute! What

should she do?

The outcome comes for Naomi from a surprising resort - something she would never expect in her wildest dreams.

Louis Nel

Ruth

Introduction

A gripping love story takes place in the Old Testament amidst violence and desertion from the young people of God. Then why this story? Does this book really have a place in the Bible? The same question is asked about a similar book written about another woman, Esther. However, both women had an enriching influence on history, each in her own way.

If we look at the other books of the Old Testament, we often see books of great extent. Books such as Deuteronomy and Leviticus

are complicated writings that are difficult to read and often difficult to understand. In contrast, Ruth is a simple story that captures your heart and has already captured the imagination of many writers. Actually, it's a romantic story that reads like a novel, a novel that often drives you to tears, because Ruth's is a very beautiful story. But there is one single sentence in Ruth that makes the book extremely complicated. In Ruth 4:17, it stands just as casually that Ruth's son, Obed, was David's ancestor. And suddenly the magnitude of that remark hits you head on, because Jesus was born of this same lineage! And

suddenly the book takes on a whole new meaning, because now it is no longer just a novel, but a piece of salvation history. Suddenly, in this sentence, we read how God included a Moabite woman, who is not even part of the People of God, in His great plan of grace.

But now I'm jumping ahead with the story.

When we were older people, there were no such things as TV's and computers and the Internet. I sat open-mouthed and listened to the stories the old people told. It was one of the great highlights of my life. And especially when

Grandma's two brothers, Uncle Peter and Uncle Abe came to visit, I listened in awe to them, because their stories were fascinating, interesting, exciting.

In Old Testament times, storytelling was so much more a part of every child's life. There were no books, and there wasn't even a Bible. There were only a few writings in circulation. Even the Genesis story was only written down during the exile. Therefore, every Jewish father was tasked with teaching his children about God's actions. A very popular way of doing this was to tell the stories to the children in story form. I can

imagine how the story of Noah was told in every household, a breathtaking, engaging story. And the stories of Abraham. Yes, it was a long sequel, but each pericope was a story on its own. And then this beautiful story of Ruth was also told. Every child knew it in detail, because one day the task would lie squarely on his shoulders to tell his own children a story exactly as Dad told them. It was important that nothing be left out, because these were the stories of God.

Although Ruth's story is set in Judgment, even before there were kings in Israel, it was written

for the first time somewhere between Solomon's reign and Ezra, thus several hundred years after the story happened. This is one of the things that makes the Bible such a great miracle, that even after such a long period of time, the story remained intact in the smallest detail. It could only have happened through the wonderful workings of the Holy Spirit. He not only inspired the writer to write it down accurately, but also the narrators to tell the story carefully.

What message does the book of Ruth want to convey to us?

People read different messages

in this beautiful book. In Ezra's time, the story may have protested against Ezra and Nehemiah's strong opposition to mixed marriages. Ruth was also the example of mutual loyalty, even where it is often not even expected. However, it is also about God's disposition, how He often miraculously provides. Perhaps we can see the main theme in Ruth's story in the proverb: Man proposes AND God disposes (with emphasis on AND). We see how each character in the story does his part. Naomi tries her best to get Ruth and Boaz together. Ruth uses all her talents to make a big

impression on Boaz. Even Boaz plays his role as he masterfully plays his cards right to trump the other contender for Ruth. But throughout it all, we see how God is involved in the whole drama, not with vivid miracles, but in a very subtle way, we see God's hand throughout the story. He uses Boaz, He provides and He is involved.

Indeed, God is still just as involved in each of our lives today. We just have to open our eyes to it and see how He provides and uses people and situations.

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for being intensely involved in Ruth's time, and still in my life today.

When Disaster Strikes

Ruth 1:1-5

Ruth's story is about survival matters, the harsh reality of life in which people are so often caught up in a struggle for survival. Work is scarce! A quarter of our country's people are unemployed. Many people move in search of greener pastures, often fruitless. Some even emigrate, and then it doesn't always get easier on the other side! Often they cry desperately to come back, but then it's too late. The story of Ruth is one such story of a family who had to leave because there was no longer any relief in the

situation for them in their own country.

The story begins with great hardship. A gruelling drought had Judea in it's iron grip. The fields did not yield crops, all scorched by the merciless sun. Elimelech tried to cultivate a piece of land, but without harvesting a single grain of wheat. Later there was no food left in the house. Elimelech and his wife Naomi were two very concerned people, for the land of milk and honey to which Moses had led them no longer gave them the breathtaking bunches of grapes that Joshua and Caleb carried

there. The world has turned into a dry desert! This family is literally facing death, and they no longer know which way to turn.

Then Elimelech makes a very drastic decision. After contemplating about the matter for days, he calls his family together. "We're going to move!"

"Where to?" Naomi wants to know. The women's talk made her understand that this drought is nationwide, throughout Judea. What's the point in exchanging one drought for another?

Then Elimelech drops the bomb: "Moab! I heard that things were going better in the land of the

Moabites."

Naomi's heart almost stops. She put her hands in front of her mouth. "No! No Elimelech, we can't! The Moabites are our enemies. They made war on us!"

But her husband has already decided, they are emigrating! Very far away, to the land of Moab, a pagan land on the other side of the Dead Sea.

Mahlon and Chilion, their two sons are excited. It's a brand new adventure awaiting them, away from the boring everyday life of Judea. And away from the bland looking Jewish girls. All the young men are talking about the

beautiful girls of Moab! "When are we moving, Father?"

And so Elimelech packs up and takes his wife Naomi and his two sons to the unknown. They cross the dry bed of the Jordan River and leave the Promised Land, the land God had given them, to find a place of refuge and where they could get food.

The family is excited to embark on a new life where they can start from scratch. But Naomi has a tightness around her heart all the time. She feels guilty for leaving her country and her family behind, and now she has to stay among a bunch of Gentiles. And

her sons? What will become of them? But once Elimelech got a bee in his bonnet.... She sighs heavily.

Things are not going well for Naomi in the new country. She struggles to communicate with the other women. Not only is everyone indifferent to her because she is a stranger, but language is a huge obstacle. But her big concern is actually her husband. Since they came here, he is not well. She sees him deteriorate day by day, literally disappearing. Later he can no longer work at all. He just sits and stares in front of him all day.

Fortunately, the two boys mixed immediately, and it wasn't long before they were admitted to the Moabite army. With their wages, they could at least have food on the table.

One day, a big disaster strikes the family. Dad Elimelech's health takes a drastic turn, and he dies. He leaves Naomi and her two sons alone in the foreign land. A grieving Naomi doesn't even have her friends or family to comfort her. But there is another, much larger sword hanging over her head - her sons. Mahlon's name means "weak" and Chilion means "exhausted". Aren't these two

boys going the same route as their father? And where are they going to find wives for themselves? Surely she doesn't hope that they fall in love with these beautiful pagan girls!

Often life leads us a detour, which is very difficult for us. Naomi definitely reached a dip in her life.

Paul and Habakuk taught us that even in the darkest pit you can still experience bubbling joy. The great secret is to seek your joy in the Lord!

Will Naomi ever be able to find her joy again? Let's follow this story and find out.

Prayer:

Lord, so often I end up in the pit
of anxiety and desperation.
Please give me a bubbling joy in
You through all my
circumstances.

Wedding Bells

Ruth 1:1-5

One night the two boys arrive at Naomi very excitedly. “Mom, I have great news! I met the girl of my dreams! Her name is Orpa, and I want to marry her, Mom!”

Naomi doesn't know if she should cry or be happy with her son. It's a pagan girl! Naomi is stunned. How can Mahlon do this to her? After she tried to teach him so well? Are there not enough girls in Judea? And what about her faith? These girls worship other gods! Throughout the night, Naomi cries. All night long she struggles with God, without getting an

answer.

The next day she tries to talk sense into her son's head, but she soon realizes that her pleas are on deaf ears. All it does is alienate her from her son, and she certainly can't afford it. She'll just have to try to accept it and live with it.

A few days later, Mahlon brought Orpa home. Naomi immediately sees why her son is in love with this girl. The two women became attached to each other straight away, and there is a close bond of friendship between them. Not long after, came the joyous day when Mahlon and Orpa got

married. Orpa may be a pagan girl, but she soon steals Naomi's heart.

Not long after, Chilion arrived home one afternoon. Right away, Naomi knows that her second son has met his dream wife. Cupido's arrow had struck again. This time, it's easier for Naomi, because she's learned by now that people who are different from her aren't necessarily bad news. The girl's name is Ruth, she learns from a blushing Chilion. And of course she is beautiful, the most beautiful girl in all of Moab!

This time, Naomi is excited to meet the new love in her son's

life, and she is certainly not disappointed. Ruth has a warm, engaging personality, and straight away the two are close friends.

Today, you and I can learn from this story that we can accept each other despite great differences. In fact, Jesus taught us not to look down on anyone! He did the unthinkable by chatting with a Samaritan woman. He even had a party with the hated tax collectors and their nasty friends. Am I better than He?

I grew up in “Old South Africa” where my friends and I were taught that we should not mix with people who are different from us.

And it went much further than that I, as a white African had to look down on the Black people. Other people were also taboo. Portuguese were strangers you hardly spoke to. Never mind Chinese, and even worse, Indians! An Englishman? They were the great enemy! However, as a child, I didn't pay much attention to it, and I had a Polish friend. In the afternoons after school, my Swazi friends and I had a wonderful time swimming naked together in the farm pond, if the adults couldn't see us. We played together, chatted and we were great friends.

Unfortunately, pressure from years of politics and even the church changed everything later.

Chilion does not waste time, and before long the couple stand before the pulpit and promise eternal love to one another.

Although the two women were Gentiles, they were a happy family together, and life began to make sense to Naomi again.

But this "happiness" could not last forever. And soon Naomi finds out something is wrong with her eldest son. A heavy aggression grabs her heart because Mahlon looks "unwell" like his father did at the time. Why did she give him

that terrible name at the time of his birth? He was cranky from day one and he cried incessantly, then she called him "the sickly one". Did she put a curse on him?

And then, ten years after that day when they left their beloved Israel, Naomi's second major disaster strikes. Her beloved son Mahlon, the sick man, has made his name justice. He dies after an exhausting illness. So far, this strange country has meant nothing but grief to Naomi. Heartbreakingly, Naomi and Orpa cry on each other's shoulders moaning this terrible loss. Mahlon and Orpa hadn't even

started a family yet. Their marriage boat had barely begun to sail, before it was sunk by a terrible storm.

But the situation would get even worse! Tomorrow, God Willing our story continues.....

Prayer:

Lord, I confess that in my life I have looked down on others who are "inferior". I try so hard today, but sometimes I'm still haughty. Please forgive me for that, and give me humility in my heart.

Crisis and Outcome

Ruth 1:5-10

Sadness became part of Naomi's life. With great sorrow in her heart, she had to leave her homeland, Judah, in exchange for the pagan Moab. Then her anchor died, Elimelech. Her son Mahlon was scarcely married, when he also died.

Still, it wasn't the end of all Naomi's grief and misery. Shortly after Mahlon's sad death, Chilion (the accomplished) also died. A battle broke out with their neighbouring country. Because Chilion was not a Moabite, he had to fight in the front line, and was

fatally wounded. And for the second time in a very short time, Naomi and her dear daughters-in-law are crying heartbreakingly one each other's shoulders.

With a shock, Naomi realizes that she is no longer only alone with great sadness, but she is also facing a huge crisis. Suddenly there are three widows together in one house - a disaster! As a widow, they had no status, and even less the prospect of any income or survival. Furthermore her husband, Elimelech, now has no offspring. And besides, she is a foreigner in a pagan land. What will become of her? The two girls

may get married again, but she is facing a huge crisis.

Can you possibly identify yourself with this terrible situation? Indeed, I have already been there, where there seemed to be no way out, the end of the road. You have probably been in such a situation at some time in your life.

But fortunately, that's not where Ruth's story ends, in fact it's actually where the real story begins. If Naomi's crisis is also your crisis, you can read on, because as the story unfolds, we see that Naomi's crisis is transformed into an opportunity that goes much, much further

than just the single main character in the story. Where God is involved in your life, a situation that seems to us to be a disaster can often become an opportunity for God to start something totally new in our lives. I can attest to that, because in my own life I suffered the disaster of bankruptcy. However, it created the space where the Lord gave me the opportunity to be in His service. Where my work has often been a torment to me, it is now a joy for me every moment, because I get the opportunity to make a difference in people's lives.

Naomi went through crisis on crisis, but she decided she wouldn't give in. There was one hope in her life that she kept clinging to, her unwavering faith in God. Yes, she would still suffer on the road ahead, but there was hope, and that hope encouraged her to keep going. There is also the same hope for you. Hold on! God is faithful!

Just when things are at their worst, Naomi brings a piece of good news. She is told that the Lord gave relief in her homeland, Judah. It was raining well and there was a good harvest. That again ignited a spark of hope in

her. Maybe she could go back to Judah. All her friends and family live there. Who knows, just maybe there will be relief for her in Judah. After all, it can only be better than here in the heathen country with its idols. There was nothing left for her here. She now has these two wonderful daughters-in-law who love her unconditionally and look after her so well. But besides them, she has absolutely nothing here. And on top of that, the three of them together are facing a major disaster, because their money is running out quickly. And there is no one who can provide for them!

Here we see how closely Divine disposition and human action are intertwined. God foresaw there in Judah, but to reap the fruits of God's provision, Naomi must not only make a decision, but she must do something constructive. She must claim that provision of the Lord. Often He also provides in my own life, but at the same time He asks me to actively do something to claim His provision or blessing. We cannot just stand and receive hands with open hands, an action is required of us. But one thing Naomi didn't mind: her two daughters-in-law. Ruth and Orpa were plunged into this

misery with her, and they were both still loyal to their mother-in-law.

However, Naomi realizes that both are still young girls. Even though they are widows, they are still in the prime of their lives. In addition, both beautiful girls and extremely marriageable. They must stay behind and try to attract the attention of the men of Moab. However, they will both be claimed for very quickly.

Naomi finally makes the decision to move back to Judah. But then comes a brand new problem: her two daughters-in-law insist on going with. However the more

Naomi explains that they can remarry here and that she can offer them absolutely nothing anymore, the more obstinate they are in their decision and say that they will not let her down. They are moving with her!

Prayer:

Lord, so often in my life I have seen You give relief when things are darkest for me. Thank you Lord, thank you for providing!

Where You Go....

Ruth 1:9-19

Naomi faces a major dilemma. She realizes all too well that her two daughters-in-law are loyal to her, and that they want to take care of her. But she can't do it to them, to drag them with her to what is a foreign land to them, with a very strange culture and a strange God.

Naomi comes up with all kinds of arguments to persuade Ruth and Orpa to abandon their plan to move with her. She explains to them that they can both get good men for themselves here in Moab. But the harder she tried,

the more sorrowful they cried. Sobbingly they groan: "Mom, we want to go to your people!"

"But what's it going to help," she tried again. "Even if I marry again, I'm too old to bring boys into the world again, if you thought you could marry my sons again! And on top of that, you could never wait long enough until they were old enough to take them as men! So, go back now!" Actually, it was an amusing picture that Naomi was trying to paint for them, but it just didn't help. The harder she tried, the more insistently they clung to the thought of going along.

Naomi was discouraged! She could see the hopelessness of the situation, but they did not want to understand reason!

Then Naomi plays her trump card. She begins to describe herself to them as a bird of ill omen, as someone who is always the suffering party. "The Lord turned against me" she declares.

And then Orpa finally makes a logical choice: she'll turn around. For her, it would only mean trouble if she went with Naomi. As a Moabite girl, she would never be accepted by the Israelites. In Judah there would be nothing for her. They say their tearful

goodbye's, and then Orpa (her name means "rebellious") turns her back on Naomi for good and the possibility that she could have become part of the People of God. She goes back to her people... ..and her gods!

But Ruth (her name means "girlfriend") keeps on foot: "Don't force me to leave and turn around, because wherever you go, I'll go; where you stay, I will stay; your people are my people; your God is my God; where you die, I will die and there I will be buried. I take an oath before the Lord: only death will separate us."

Nice words! But these are not

hollow promises. Ruth means every word she says. She had plenty of time to think the matter through. And even when Orpa gets cold feet and turns back, Ruth doesn't hesitate for a single moment.

Ruth realizes very well what the possible consequences of her action could be. She knows she is facing rejection, rejection of the often ruthless Israelis who cannot tolerate foreigners. Israelites who will definitely exclude her from their close circle of friends. She clearly realizes that she is in great trouble because, although the harvests in Judah are good, there

is no guarantee that she, as a Moabite girl, will ever be able to benefit. She realizes that she will have to prove herself in order to become part of this new nation. And moreover, she realizes that she will have to give up her religion with which she grew up. She must adopt a totally new religion, which is totally foreign to her.

She declares herself ready for all this, and to prove how serious she feels about it, she affirms it with an oath. That settled the matter, and the two desperate women started their long journey to Bethlehem in Judah.

And so begins the remarkable story of Ruth. So far, this has been Naomi's story, but from here on further, she moves into the background. Ruth's statement: "Wherever you go, I will go... .." echoed through the ages as surely the most famous statement ever made by any woman!

By the way, it is also remarkable that in a time when only men were heard and mattered, here is a story that is exclusively about a few women. Simple women, widows with no status, who made decisions that influenced the entire course of history. Ruth was a heathen, a Moabite girl, but her

decision led to the birth of the greatest king ever, the history of Israel, David. But furthermore, she was a very important link in the genealogical tree of Jesus.

Do you consider yourself a "nobody"? Like Ruth? Rest assured that you are very, very important to God. He has placed you on earth for a very special purpose, and He would like to use each of us. But just as in the case of Ruth, you must prepare yourself to do what the Lord wants. Be willing to stand in His service, and He will use you as He wishes. Ruth had no idea where the Lord would use her, but

she was willing. Put yourself at His disposal!

Prayer:

Lord, I am willing to go where You send me. I am willing to do what you want. Please use me, Lord!

The Walls of Jericho

Ruth 1:19-22

So Naomi and Ruth set off on their long journey to Bethlehem in Judea. Naomi is excited, because after ten years of loneliness and rejection, she's on her way back home. She sings all the way while walking in high spirits. Ruth, on the other hand, walks with mixed feelings. She leaves behind all her family, her parents, sisters, friends. Yes, also her gods with whom she grew up. You can't just say goodbye to the gods you have been worshipping all these years? It was burnt deep into her essence from childhood, like a

tattoo. How is she going to get rid of it? But there is no turning back, for she has already given her word to her mother-in-law: "Your land is my land and your God is my God...."

But on the other hand, a brand new adventure lies ahead for her. There is a new, unknown country that she has just heard of, a country with new people and a culture that is very strange. She is practicing hard to get used to this new idea of God, but she is excited because Naomi told her with such enthusiasm about the God of Israel, the God of wonders and the stories Naomi tells takes

her breath away. With surprise, she must hear that they have the same ancestor, Abraham!

Naomi also tells of the great leader Moses, who freed the entire nation of Egypt of more than three million people from slavery. And of the breathtaking miracle when the Egyptians trapped the people like rats against the Red Sea. Naomi's God simply cleaved the sea in front of them so that they could flee through it. When the Egyptians followed them, God closed the sea again and drowned all the Pharaoh's soldiers!

The road is very long, and for days the two women walk north, uphill, downhill over almost impassable terrain. Thank goodness for the donkey carrying their belongings! But the long road gives Naomi plenty of time to tell Ruth everything about her God and of the day the people met God almost face to face at Mount Sinai. Yet such a pity that Grandpa and his people were so frightened that they did not want to see God! And she tells of the water out of the rock and the manna and quail. Ruth's mouth hangs open shamelessly from sheer wonder.

When the two finally turn west and descend the steep downhill slope to the Jordan River, Naomi tells Ruth of the day when the people faced this very river. It was impenetrable, because it was in full flood. But then the priests walked carrying the Ark of the Covenant to the water. The moment their feet touched the water, the raging water turmoil dried up, and the people could walk through on dry land.

Ruth gasps for breath. How is this ever possible? This God must be an almighty God!

Getting through the Jordan is a bit of a struggle, and it takes a lot of

persuading the donkey to get him through the water. And the river is not even in flood! Ruth could imagine what it must have looked like that day. Across the river, they walk past the ruins of a city. Ruth can clearly see that this must once have been a prosperous city. "Jericho," Naomi explains. "We were just walking around the high walls of the city, seven days in a row. On the seventh day, the entire city's walls crumbled before our eyes and collapsed. Our men simply climbed over the clutter and took the city without any resistance. Our God gave us the city without us even fighting for it!"

Now Ruth is finally convinced. Here is the tangible proof before her! She will worship this God with heart and soul and mind! He is so different from the gods she is used to. She constantly lived in fear of her gods, but this God of Naomi is loving and He cares for His people. She also wants to be part of this people!

Surely you will not blame me for writing something more than that is mentioned in the Bible. The Bible relates Ruth and Naomi's story in a few sentences. But I am sure that it is very likely that something similar to what I described would have happened,

because how else would Ruth have come to believe in this wonderful God?

Surely Naomi would have told Ruth about her God, because Ruth had already decided that this God would be her God too.

The question is whether you and I are enthusiastic about our Lord? Yes, of course we sing with enthusiasm for Him in the church. But are we willing to talk enthusiastically about Him outside the church as well? At work, in our circle of friends, as we stand and braai? Does He Really Excite You?

I challenge you: show your

excitement about the Lord to other people. Start with fellow believers, and when you have more confidence, also towards the world out there.

Prayer:

Lord, I am very excited about You. I cannot stop talking about You! Please give me the courage to live out my excitement out there too!

Rahab the Prostitute

Joshua 2

The two women struggled endlessly to drag the donkey through the river, with the sun already hanging low behind the high mountains that towered in front of them. They decide to camp there right in the shelter of the remains of Jericho for the night. Ruth marvels at the remains of the city. Looking at the clutter left from the walls, she could imagine how big and strong and terribly high the walls had to be. All the magnificent walls were flattened, as if a giant hand simply wiped it away from the

earth. All but a single piece of the wall that rose into the air intact.

“I wonder about that piece of wall. Why didn't it also fall?”

Naomi laughs: “Oh this? It's Rahab's house! She was a prostitute! Married family of mine, actually. But that's a very long story. I'll tell you another day!”

Now Ruth is very curious. “Please Naomi! Tell me now while we're here.”

“Well then. When the great leader Joshua brought the people to the Jordan, he decided to send two spies into the country to properly plan for their invasion of Jericho.

The two men then sneaked into the city, and they decided to spend the night there. All that was safe was the prostitute's house, Ragab."

"It sounds a little suspicious to me!"

"No, that's not what you think! They just wanted to get out from under the soldiers' scrutiny. But the soldiers became suspicious and then they went looking for the two. Our God must surely have spoken to Ragab, for then she decided to hide the two spies for the soldiers. On her roof she had a pile of flax that she was drying. She allowed them to hide under

the flax until the soldiers were gone. And so they were saved from a certain death."

"Wonderful story! What happened to them then?"

"The two men were so grateful that they promised her they would save her and her family's lives when they invaded the city. Ragab's house was in the city wall. All she had to do was hang a red cloth from her window when they attacked. She dropped the two of them that night with a basket on a rope through her window outside the wall to escape."

"And was she saved then? Did

they keep their promise?”

“Of course, Ruth! That day as the city walls collapsed, only the wall of Ruth's house remained standing. All the Israelites saw the red cloth fluttering in her window. Her whole family was saved, and they were the only survivors in the entire city!”

“Oh, what a beautiful story! But what happened to her, Naomi? Has she ever been accepted by the people?”

“Oh yes! She later married an Israelite, and they are such a happy couple. His name is Salmon, and they had a boy and named him Boaz. He is already a

grown man, a very handsome man! And prosperous! He farms aggressively, and he bought plenty of land. Surely a man who is pleasing to the eye! In addition, we are distantly related, you will surely meet him.”

Their campfire burns low, and the two women decide to settle for the night. But Ruth cannot sleep. In the moonlight, she sees Ragab's tower etched against the clear sky. She wonders about that Boaz that Naomi told her about. She never said he was married. "Pleasing to the eye," Naomi described him. She smiled. She is allowed to dream!

But there are other things that are worrying Ruth. How will the people accept her? Are they going to favour her? Will they ever allow her to become part of the nation? They did accept Rahab the prostitute. But she? She is a Moabite, and they and Israel have been enemies for years!

And then, for the first time, Ruth decides to pray to this God of Naomi and of Israel. If He was big and powerful enough to do these breathtaking miracles, then surely He could help her! And if He could place Rahab, a prostitute in the hearts of this people, then

surely He could make room for her, Ruth the Moabite in the hearts of these foreign people too!

The story of Rahab asks me and you to fully accept other people who are different from us in love. Why is it so often difficult for us? Finally, Ruth was accepted, and both Ruth the Moabite and Rahab the Canaanite prostitute were recorded in the genealogical tree of Jesus, fully and completely accepted by God!

Let's do the same today, and forget about our differences.

Prayer:

Lord, I must confess today that I still look down on people because they are different from me. I realize truly that it is actually unkind, and I ask for forgiveness. Please guide me to accept people unconditionally.

Back in Bethlehem

Ruth 1:19-22

The story of Ragab would remain in Ruth's mind for more than one reason for the rest of her life. After a night spent by the two women next to the ruins of Jericho, a brand new challenge awaits them. The last stage of their journey to Bethlehem has arrived, and now Ruth looks with great concern at the silhouette of mountains that appear before her in the morning twilight. Drab, dry stones are all she sees. "Do we really need to go up here?" She asks her mother-in-law.

Naomi nodded, "The sooner we

get on our way, the better, before the sun burns too hot!"

When the blazing sun appears across the Jordan beyond the mountains, the two are already halfway up the steep slopes. Ruth feels her lungs starting to burn from the steep climb. As the sun reaches its peak, the two lie down in the shadow of a large rock. The sun had already burned them mercilessly, and nowhere has Ruth even seen a hint of greenery. It's a barren world! Gratefully, she swallows some lukewarm water from the leather bag on her donkey's back. "We're already halfway up," consoled

Naomi. She has gained so much more respect for this daughter-in-law of her in the past few days days!

By late afternoon, they reach the summit of the mountains. Before them, the impressive city of Jerusalem rises up. Ruth marvels at the majestic walls of the beautiful city glowing in the late afternoon sun. On the steep slopes that runs down to the city is a small village and a lush garden of olive trees. Naomi soon realizes that they will not reach Bethlehem before dark, so then they decide to look for a spot under the olive trees to spend the

night.

Ruth is disappointed that it will now take another day before she sees her new home. But it is with great pleasure that she lies down under an age-old olive tree. She is even more disappointed to learn from Naomi that this beautiful city does not belong to the people. "We have never been able to conquer the city," she explains. "These walls are too high and too strong for any army. It will take a very smart and strong king to conquer it."

"But isn't Israel's king smart enough?"

"No Ruth!" laughs Naomi. "Our

people do not have a king!"

"Now I don't understand, Naomi?"

"We don't need a king because our God rules us. Yes, we do have judges who lead the people, but unlike all the other peoples, we do not have a king."

At first light, Ruth is up and ready to go. She couldn't wait to get to Bethlehem anymore. Even before the sun rises too high, they see the hamlet of Bethlehem nestled between the hills. Now Ruth is in a great hurry, but at the same time a ball of nerves is gnawing at her stomach. Will the people of Bethlehem ever accept her?

"Isn't it Naomi walking there?"

"It's unmistakable her! Naomi is back! Naomi is back!"

"But who is the strange girl there with her? And where is Elimelek then?"

The joy is very great to have their friend and family member with them again after so many years abroad. They laugh and cry, they kiss, embrace and chat! Meanwhile Ruth is being totally ignored. Then someone asks the question: "And who is this with you? Don't you introduce us?"

"It's Ruth, my daughter-in-law. She's a Moabite girl."

An uncomfortable silence fell over the group of women. No one knows how to handle this situation. She is a Moabite! The enemy!

What was meant to be a delightful reunion for Naomi (her name means "pleasant") is now not so pleasant at all. Her daughter-in-law receives a cold reception. She knows all too well that this is not the end of her misery. She realizes that she and Ruth are still facing a very difficult road ahead. "Don't call me Naomi anymore. Rather call me Mara – Bitterness," she requests her friends. For Naomi, God's

disposition is still incomprehensible. But one thing she knows is that God is not far away, but that He is personally busy in her life. Indeed, God has not finished with Naomi at all, and also certainly not Ruth! In addition, she herself has some plans up her sleeve! For a start, she saw immediately that the barley harvest had just commenced. And she started thinking

In the same way, God is definitely not done with you and me. We dare not sit still and do nothing. Ask for God's will for you. Then get creative, and do something

real!

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for this heartbreaking story of Ruth, and for the wonderful life lessons I can learn from this.

The Harvest is Ready

Ruth 2:1-2

When Naomi and her daughter-in-law approached Bethlehem, her heart beat faster. No, it wasn't because she was back home at last, but what she saw in the field made her very excited.

That night, next to Jericho's fallen walls, she prayed endlessly for the Lord's guidance. When she told Ruth about Ragab, a thought suddenly dawned on her. That son of Rahab, Boaz - if only she could get something worked out with him. He might just be the answer to all their problems. If only he didn't get married again in

the meantime!

When they drew near Bethlehem, Naomi suddenly saw the fields. The harvests were ripe, and the farmers had just begun to harvest. That would mean that she and Ruth had the prospect of food on the table. The law says that the men who harvest may not pick up the fallen ears of barley. It must be left there for the widows and the poor to come and pick up, so that they too can share in the harvest. There is a frolic in Naomi's step already, and she smiles at Ruth. "The Lord has provided for us!"

Ruth doesn't quite understand

what Naomi's excitement is all about, and then she has to explain some of the precepts Moses made at the time so that the widows could survive. "Does that mean I can pick up barley for us so we can have food in the house?" Ruth never even thought about having to do anything to survive.

Naomi's house, which she left behind when she and Elimelech were then at Moab, was still waiting for her, and she and Ruth moved in. Of course, the neighbours are very happy to have Naomi there again, and there is no shortage of hospitality.

Everyone comes to help make their home livable, and people from all over bringing food.

For a week or two everything goes very well, but then the food supply starts to dry up. Naomi realizes too well that they will have to plan quickly, otherwise the two of them will certainly not survive. Ruth offers to pick up barley in the fields where they are harvesting, but Naomi is afraid that she will be turned away because she is a Moabite. Although everyone is very endearing to Naomi, they are very aloof to Ruth, they just can't accept her.

“Can I go and pick up barley, please Mom?” Pleaded Ruth one night with her mother-in-law, when only a small handful of flour was left. Half reluctantly she finally agrees. She knows her people, and she knows all too well that they do not tolerate strangers. But maybe there is someone with a soft heart somewhere.

Ruth got up very early the next morning. She's excited because she found out she could do her part to make the two of them survive. With a bounce in her step and a song in her heart, she hopefully walks from Bethlehem

to the fields. There she already met the workers, working with their sickles to cut off the horny grain. Her eye catches the few ears of barley that accidentally fall to the ground, and then she sees that it is exactly as her mother-in-law told her. The men do not stoop to pick up the lost grain, it is just as lying there.

She eagerly steps closer, but then the antagonism of the Jews hits her. The men make all kinds of awkward comments about her, and the women who run behind the cutters to pick up barley are very hostile to her. "What are you looking for?" They want to know.

"There is no place for Gentiles here!"

Ruth is still trying to explain that she also now worships the God of Israel, but they do not even want to listen. Her whole appearance pleads: "This is a Moabite!"

Ruth is in tears when she arrives at Naomi's late afternoon, without a single grain of barley to show for her day's work. She was on many farms, but at each location it is exactly the same story. A Moabite is definitely not welcome here! Ruth and Naomi are discouraged!

What does our hospitality look like? "But naturally I'm

hospitable!” However, our hospitality usually extends as far as our family and friends, or maybe even a stranger, as long as he doesn't differ too much from me. However, if anyone is different than me, then I get very upset!

Who is welcome in my church? When a tramp walks in with clothes that have not seen soap and water for a long time, he is often shown the door very quickly! Then we are definitely not hospitable!

Jesus did not reject anyone, not even the hated Samaritans and tax collectors. He expects the

same from you and me. True hospitality is one of the hardest ways to live out true love.

Prayer:

Lord, I stand deeply in guilt before You, for so often I am unloving and do not live out true hospitality. Please make me truly hospitable.

A second chance

Ruth 2:1-3

Ruth was in tears when she arrived home that night. She was discouraged, because at every field she came to, she was refused. She knew it was going to be difficult, but she never expected it to be so bad! In addition, she still had to endure the razor-sharp tongues of Jewish women. Naomi was deeply hurt for her poor daughter-in-law. She certainly didn't deserve it!

But Naomi didn't come here just to give up. Slowly a thought began to take form in her head. "Boaz!" She thinks aloud, "Boaz

is a good man!"

Ruth had a big question mark on her face as she saw Naomi smiling. "You have to go to Boaz's fields, Ruth. He won't chase you away, I'm sure you won't be humiliated there!"

Then Naomi tells Ruth about her long-lost relative, Boaz. "Actually, he is a relative of your late father-in-law, Elimelech. Remember the story I told you about the prostitute Rahab? After Jericho's fall, she was married to a man named Salmon. He was a cousin of Elimelech. Boaz is their son, so he is close family because I married Elimelech. And of course

you were married to Elimelech's son, so it automatically makes you family of him, even if you are a Moabite. she and Boaz are family.

Boaz is a very wealthy man with large fields. He was known for many years as someone who was not ashamed of hard work. He even went to work with his labourers in the fields. "Shame," Naomi thought out loud, "the poor man! He can't get over his wife's death."

With great hesitation, Ruth walked to the fields the next morning. The spring is no longer in her stride - she's scared! The

previous day she had so many set-backs at all the fields that she went to. Everyone rejected her! What if she was so humiliated again? She becomes ice cold when she remembers the looks the men gave her, as if she was a bad woman! Ruth makes a wide detour around the fields where she had such a cold reception the day before. She chooses the direction which Naomi gave her. From a distance, she can hear giggling and laughing, and she feels that she is the subject of some sort of vulgar joke. It hurts, bitterly. What did she do to earn it?

When Ruth arrives at Boaz's fields, her heart beat loudly. She doesn't know what to expect. Her mind tells her to turn around and run away as long as there is still time. But her heart says, "Hang in there!" She moves forward shakily. A cutter looks at her for a moment, but then he goes on with his work, engrossed in his harvesting.

She notices a man who seems to be in charge of the workers. Her knees feel shaky as she walks up to him: "Sir, may I pick up some barley?"

The man smiles kindly at her: "Of course! Just pick a place where

no other widows are picking up."

Hesitantly, Ruth heads to an open spot where no one is picking up. She makes sure she stays far away from the other women, and that her headscarf hangs low over her eyes, just in case someone might recognize her. She was surprised at how recklessly the cutters dropped barley. There is plenty for her to gather.

Late that afternoon, after the cutters packed up their sickles for the day, a tired Ruth runs as fast as her legs can carry her back to her mother-in-law. In a bag, she has enough grain to provide bread for the two of them for at

least a week. She doesn't even hear the cutting remarks when she runs past other women. She is over-joyed, because at last she is also accepted by someone as a human being. She can't help wondering why the people who work for Boaz are so different from the other Israelites. They seem happy in their work, and you constantly hear the men cheerfully singing songs as they harvest. Does it have something to do with their boss?

If you are an employer, what does the mood of the people working for you look like? Are they truly happy, and do they enjoy working

for you? Are you the “boss” or are you one of them? Remember, the love command Jesus gave does not end with my family and friends. It goes much further, also to my employees and even strangers.

In addition, love and humility go hand in hand. Being humble means, among other things, that I won't even elevate myself above my employees. Remember, Jesus even washed His disciples' dirty feet!

Prayer:

Lord, help me to radiate Your love, also in my workplace, so that all who work with me will

experience Your love.

Boaz on the Fields

Ruth 2:4-7

Shortly after the cock crows, Ruth is up and running. A handful of the barley she picked up yesterday in Boaz's fields is carefully ground to a fine flour. She is careful to use just enough for Naomi to bake a loaf of bread for the two of them. Grinding the barley is hard work, but she's used to it, she's been doing it ever since she was a little girl.

When she is done, she quickly walks down to the grain field where she picked up the remains the day before. This is a long walk, but the skipping is back in

her step this morning, and there is a song in her heart. Life certainly has meaning. She now begins to understand what Naomi was talking about when she told her about God, that He provided and that He was good. He is so different from the dead gods she has worshipped all these years. Just look how He provided for their needs. Just as they began to run out of food, God gave her someone who was kind to her as a stranger. She was so overwhelmed by the kindness of the workers on Boaz's land that she had already forgotten about the previous day's humiliation.

Arriving at Boaz's cornfield, the first cutters just arrived. She is greeted kindly. She just can't help noticing that the people who work here are so different from the others. Everyone seems to have job satisfaction here. Not only do they work to earn money, but they enjoy working here.

The foreman tells Ruth that she can fall in behind the cutters. It is hard work bending and picking up a few veins here and there, and the sun is burning down on them mercilessly. But Ruth scarcely felt it, for her heart is rejoicing. She can also eventually do her part for her and Naomi's upkeep.

Later in the morning a man came out from Bethlehem's direction. When Ruth looks up, she sees him. He is well dressed, not like the ordinary workers, but like someone who is wealthy. When he arrives at the fields, he is greeted very politely and excitedly by all the cutters. He walks through the grain field talking talking and joking with the cutters. Ruth can immediately see that this is someone who is very popular with the workers. Only after he greeted everyone on the fields did he go to the foreman and fall into a deep conversation with him. "It must be Boaz," thought Ruth. "I certainly wouldn't

mind working for such a boss. Just look how friendly he is to his workers!"

Boaz immediately noticed the strange girl on his corn field. "Who is that girl?" He wants to know from the foreman.

"A Moabite widow," said the foreman hesitantly. He is not sure how his boss would react to allowing a pagan girl to pick up barley. Then he quickly adds, "She and Naomi came from Moab." He says he only gave her permission to walk behind the cutters, because he couldn't find it in his heart to turn her away when she came to ask if she could pick

up barley. The poor girl looked so scared and bewildered. "It's hard for a Moabite to be accepted here. After all, our people are not easy people. "He tries to justify his consent.

"Yes, my old friend," laughs Boaz. "You pretend to be such a very strict supervisor, but you have a gentle heart in you. Of course you did right! I don't blame you at all."

Naomi - yes, he heard that Naomi was back and that her Moabite daughter-in-law had come along. He was so worried about Naomi when he learned of Elimelech and his two sons' tragic death there in the foreign country. What would

become of her? He is glad that she is back, but he is worried about her, because now she does not even have children who can take care of her as a widow.

But what Boaz cannot understand is this daughter-in-law of hers who came from Moab. What would cause an attractive young girl like Ruth to come with Naomi? Although she is now a widow, she is still extremely marriageable, and he is sure that the men from Moab would appreciate such a beautiful woman! Is there really anything for her in Israel? She must love her mother-in-law very much to make such a great

sacrifice. “Tell the men to leave her alone!” He warns the foreman, “I know the men, and I know that they have no respect for someone who is not an Israelite. If they bother her, there is trouble!”

Compassion is one of the attributes of a believer's life that Jesus clearly demonstrated. It is an integral part of love. Compassion is to care when someone is suffering, but it must not remain only a feeling. It must cross over to the practical act of love.

Prayer:

Lord, please give me a true heart

of care and compassion, and also the zeal to live it out practically.

He is Interested in Me

Ruth 2:5-13

Boaz stand watching as the young Moabite girl stoops eagerly to pick up barley. He so much wants to start a conversation with her, but is afraid what his men will think. After all, she is a Moabite, a heathen, and he is a respected and of course decent Jewish man!

Then Boaz decides that the girl's well-being is more important than his reputation. It is at this very moment that Ruth decides to take a break. This is the sign for Boaz, and with that he walks over to Ruth, where she falls down under

a tree to rest. He definitely wants to get to know this brave girl. He wants to find out what made her make this radical decision to sacrifice everything in her country to come to Judea with her mother-in-law.

Boaz realizes all too well that he dares not pay too much attention to her, because it is not appropriate for a Jewish man, especially not a reputed landowner like him, to have conversations with a pagan girl. He prefers to hold this first meeting very briefly and speak as little as possible.

"I understand you're Naomi's

daughter-in-law, I'm Boaz."

Ruth could not believe that such a prominent Jew as Boaz would be interested in her. Why does he bother to talk to her? Quickly she jumps up and bows her head humbly as she was taught to do for distinguished people.

"Listen Ruth, life around here is tough! You have probably already noticed that the Jews do not accept you easily. I want to give you good advice: do not go to the fields of others, because there you will find trouble. Just stay here in my field. I know Naomi very well, so you are very welcome to pick up grain here

every day.”

Ruth is very grateful, because now it is not only the foreman who gives permission, but the owner who personally gives his permission that she can pick up barley here. "Thank you very much!" She murmurs humbly, without raising her eyes.

Boaz wants to turn around and walk away, but then another thought strikes him, and he turns back to her. "And if you are thirsty - drink from the water that the cutters brought. And don't worry about the men, my workmen won't bother you. I told them to leave you alone. "Boaz smiles

reassuringly to Ruth to put her at ease, because he can see how nervous she is. With that, he turns and walks away.

Ruth's heart is jumping with pure joy. “Why is everyone so good to me?” She wonders. “What did I do to earn it? I'm just a Moabite girl in a foreign country, and the people not only accept me, but they care about me, they're good to me!”

She stands and looks back at Boaz as he walks away to join his workers. “What a wonderful man! Wow, if he and I maybe

She blushe at the mere thought that Boaz would be interested in

her as a woman at all. "No, it can't!" She tells herself. Why would anyone of his stature now be interested in a simple pagan girl? She's definitely not good enough for him! Moreover, she knows that the Jews are so strict about their religion, and though she has accepted this belief, she knows very little about it. She still has so much to learn! She's only just started!

A wonderful story, that of Ruth. But this is also my story and maybe yours too. Like Ruth, I have also so often wondered why the Lord is so good to me? I definitely don't deserve it! When I

think back on my life, I see so many ugly things that were part of my life. My sins were written down in several volumes. But of course I know that all this is already forgiven. The Lord assures me in the many promises in His Word that He forgives me for everything I did. But what about my current life? Is my life really good enough to please Him? When I look at some other people who have a life so wonderfully close to God, I get embarrassed. And my knowledge of Him and His Word is so limited! Will He ever be interested in me, insignificant person? Sometimes I want to run away!

But then I hear what Jesus' heart looks like. He talks intimately and with great patience and compassion to a woman there at the well, someone who was hated by the Jews and despised by her own people. He holds a feast with the scum of the earth, and He is intensely interested in these harsh men. He gives eternal life to a murderer who is dying on a cross.

Of course I am also important to Him. He also cares for me. After all, I am His child, and He loves me very much!

Prayer:

Lord, I can only say "Thank you,

thank you, thank you!" every day.
Your mercy to me is
incomprehensible. I didn't do
anything to earn it.

Why is He so Good to Me?

Ruth 2:10-18

The pretty young girl on the fields, the Moabite, she stays in Boaz's thoughts when he returns to Bethlehem in the late afternoon. Back at his spacious home, he stretches out on the cool roof, after a hard day in the sun. "Tell me about Ruth," he asks a maid when she brings him a cup of water.

She looks at him meaningfully: "Sir, do you mean Naomi's daughter-in-law? Yes, the whole town is buzzing about her, Sir! She certainly has a lot more courage than brains. Why would

a Moabite girl come to this place now to be humiliated by everyone here? I feel sorry for her, Sir.” The maid babbled and Boaz almost regretted asking her the question.

“Sir, she may be a Moabite, but she takes good care of her mother-in-law and supports her in every way. And she's not afraid of hard work either! Sir, are you perhaps interested in her? Oh no sir, she's a heathen! Surely it can't be possible!

Boaz laughs at the maid's assumptions. "No, I just wanted to know about her!" She let out a sigh of relief. Surely it would be the scandal of the year if the

famous Boaz had to marry a pagan woman! But somewhere in Boaz, there is something that just makes his heart beat faster when he sees that girl's beautiful, loving eyes in his mind.

The next morning Boaz is in his fields early. His eyes search for the Moabite girl. After hearing all about her, he now has a great admiration for her courage and her dedication and her love for her mother-in-law. The foreman wants to discuss all kinds of things with Boaz this morning, but he soon realizes that Boaz's thoughts are not with him at all, and doesn't even hear what he's

saying, which is unusual. He's clearly on another planet!

Boaz mingles with the workers and greets each one personally and inquires about their well-being. But unnoticed, he is aiming for Ruth. When he comes to her, she bows deeply before him. She can't understand why he, a well-known Israelite, is so good to her. She did nothing to deserve it. "Sir, why are you so good to me?" She wants to know, "I'm just a foreigner with no rights or status?"

Then Boaz answers her: "I know everything you did for your mother-in-law, I know how good

you are to her. May the Lord reward you for all you have done." Boaz can't help but admire her, because the maid also told him that Ruth had given up her gods and that she now worships the only true God! "I understand that you have come to find shelter under the wings of the God of Israel - He will richly bless you!"

For Ruth, Boaz's words are like the refreshment of a cool fountain: "Sir, you make me feel so good, and I'm not even one of your servants!"

Boaz has to tear himself away from this girl. He takes a sickle and begins cutting grain with the

men. Muddles thoughts go through his head. He still can't understand it. And why does he suddenly have this attraction to the pagan girl?

When lunchtime arrives, the cutters settle in the shade of a lonely tree with Boaz. Ruth was also aiming for the same shadow spot, but when she saw the men there, she decided to rather sit in the hot sun and relax. But Boaz calls her closer: "Come and sit here with us! Here is enough bread for you too, and we have a wonderful wine sauce to dip the bread in today." Ruth has not eaten for so long. The fried wheat

- she licks her fingers clean. Boaz saw how she enjoyed it, so he gave her what was left to take home.

When Ruth steps back to her spot where she picks up her barley, Boaz quickly calls the men together: "I feel very sorry for that girl," he whispers to them. Drop extra ears and let her pick it up - pretend you don't notice it!" The men nod their heads meaningfully - they understand all too well

Late afternoon, Ruth walks home cheerfully. She can't wait to tell Naomi everything. This afternoon she is carrying a heavy bundle of thirteen kilos of grain that she had

collected, enough to keep them both alive for a long time. "The God of Israel is wonderful!" It bubbles inside her.

You and I can also rejoice like Ruth that the Lord is so incomprehensibly good to us. What did we do to earn it all? Everything, everything is grace! This morning I also feel like Ruth, because I just can't understand why Jesus paid for my sins. I can only accept it with immense gratitude.

Prayer:

Lord, thank you, thank you, thank you! I think again of the price you paid for me on the cross, the

horror you had to go through to pay for my sins. I just don't have words to thank you enough.

Ruth is Excited!

Ruth 2:17-19

That dusty road back to Bethlehem felt endless to Ruth that afternoon. She couldn't wait to get home to tell Naomi everything! This afternoon she has her hands full with the fragrant left-over fried rice, a bottle of wine sauce, and on her shoulders she is balancing the heavy bag of barley she had picked up that day.

Ruth barely feels the heavy bag on her shoulders as she runs to Bethlehem the last bit of way. To the people staring at her, she laughs and greets them with a

cheerful “Shalom!” The women shake their heads compassionately as they stare at her. “What does she have to laugh about and be cheerful? Poor thing!”

At home, Naomi is preparing dinner. She bakes a barley bread from the barley that Ruth brought home the day before. She sees Ruth skipping down the dusty street, and from a distance she could also see that something big had happened in her dear daughter-in-law's life. She skipping and dancing and laughing as she comes down the narrow street. Naomi smiles

meaningfully, something is brooding!

"Mommy, just keep the bread for tomorrow - I brought some dinner for us: savoury fried wheat and a delicious wine sauce!"

Naomi tries to keep a straight face, she pretends not to notice Ruth's excitement. Very seriously she asks: "And where did you pick up grain today? Did things go better today?" She pretends not to have seen through everything, but is bursting with excitement because the cheerful Ruth of old is back. Naomi is burning with curiosity, but she holds her constraint because she wants to

hear it from Ruth's own mouth.

"I was at Boaz's fields," Ruth beamed, and Naomi could see that there was something much bigger behind her answer. Then Ruth bursts into a flood of words, and she tells of this wonderful man who even invited her to come for lunch with him, and he gave her food to take home, and what a wonderful boss he was for his workmates, and he works just as hard as they do, and he's so kind and he Naomi's ears are whistling properly as Ruth bubbles on without breathing. But in the meantime, she wants to burst with excitement and joy.

"Please tell me more about Boaz," Ruth asks her mother-in-law, "he told me to stay with his workers until the harvest is finished. I don't understand at all, he's not like the other landowners. He knows I'm a Moabite, but it doesn't seem to bother him at all. What makes him different? Why is he so good to me?"

Naomi's head is spinning, Ruth is asking twenty questions at once, and she can only answer one at a time! "Ruth, you have to understand that family ties in Israel are a very complicated thing, and that they are a

tremendously important part of our entire humanity. Family stands together through thick and thin. The bond that ties families together is a very strong bond."

She goes on to explain that family is not only a father and mother and children, but it includes all cousins and nieces and uncles and aunts to form a large, extended "family". And this family takes care of each other so that no one ever suffers. Furthermore the different tribes of Israel are descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob. For example, Judah is actually one giant family, so they all stand together.

“In theory, therefore, everyone has to look after one another, and even widows will be taken care of, because the extended family, or the whole community, must help care for them. But because people are just fallible people, it doesn't always work that way in practice,” Naomi explains. “That is why Moses had to put in place other plans to prevent widows from falling into poverty.”

Since Ruth's time, everything has deteriorated even further, and today, in most cases, family ties have completely crumbled. Families no longer care for one another, and often a "renegade"

family member is totally thrown out. Children even completely forget about their parents. Old people are no longer taken care of by children, and they end up in old age homes, where they are often completely forgotten and totally neglected. Often such old people must try to survive on a meager pension in dire circumstances.

You and I cannot point fingers at such children! Remember, because our believers are all children of God, it makes us blood family to each other! So that lonely old aunt is also blood family of mine, and it is my duty to

at least give her some love and attention. Cheer up her day by gathering a few people and visiting the lonely people in the old age home. Bring a guitar, and sing along with them – old nostalgic songs. Take cookies and have a nice party. Let's give new hope to the old people who have lost all hope.

Prayer:

Lord, we are all guilty because we forget conveniently of the elderly. Forgive us, and give us the zeal to care for them.

My Redeemer

Ruth 2: 20-23

Naomi explains to Ruth that people easily forget about their family responsibilities, and it is especially the widows who suffer.

"Therefore, one of the regulations of Moses is that there must be a 'redeemer system'. Boaz is one of our redeemers."

There is a big question mark on Ruth's face: "Redeemer? What is that?"

Then Naomi explains: "A redeemer actually has several duties within the family circle. For example, one of his duties is that

if a family member dies in an accident as a result of someone's negligence, then he must ensure that the family member's death is revenged."

Ruth makes a sour face: "What does it have to do with our situation then?"

"Wait Ruth, it's just one of many duties. Furthermore, if a family member somehow becomes a slave, it is also the duty of the redeemer to redeem the slave. It can happen so easily that you become a slave. If you get too deep into debt and can no longer pay, your creditor can sell you as a slave to get his debt!"

But Ruth still doesn't understand what it had to do with the two of them. "Ruth, if a family member dies, the redeemer must ensure that the person's land remains within the family. And if no children have been born yet, it is even his duty to marry the widow and raise her children so that the family name can live on."

Ruth blushes. And then she suddenly realizes with a shock that Naomi is actually the widow in the family. If Boaz is the family redeemer, then that means he has to marry Naomi! "Mom" She began, but Naomi immediately saw what Ruth

wanted to ask.

“Ruth, you are now inextricably part of the family. I'm too old to have children, so it won't help that he marries me. You are now the next link in our family, because even though you are from another country, you were married to your late father-in-law's son. So you are the one who has to carry Father Elimelech's family name!”

Ruth's eyes widen, and her heart beats in her throat. Suddenly, she sits with a much greater responsibility on her shoulders than she realized.

“But there's a problem, Ruth. Boaz is not the only redeemer in

our family. There is also another young man. And I've already seen him look at you with eager eyes although he is family. I don't think the two of you will ever suit each other.”

Naomi realizes that Ruth will have to play her cards well. “Boaz,” Naomi thought, and a smile played around her corners, “Boaz will be the ideal man for Ruth. But I still have to work hard on a plan to get the two together! And then there's the problem of that other young redeemer trying to draw Ruth's attention! How do you get rid of him?”

For the next couple of weeks,

Ruth was up at dawn every day to pick up grain in Boaz's fields. With great satisfaction she sees how their supply of grain is growing daily. Surely there is enough to see her and Naomi through until the next harvest. But still she goes back, because on the land there is a big attraction. Every time she hopes to see Boaz and is disappointed when he is not there. How she looks forward to every day! Ruth is glowing!

Unfortunately for her, the day comes when the last of the sheaves are brought to Boaz' fields. That next day, Ruth sighed

heavily. There is an emptiness in her. What now? What is she going to do now? How will she ever get through the days without those wonderful times with Boaz and his workers?

Is there also someone in your life that makes you so excited? No, I do not mean that handsome man or beautiful girl. I'm actually talking about Jesus. Are you also eager to start the day with Him? Do you have an unquenchable desire to spend the whole day with Him? My day is empty if I cannot see Him, or be aware of His presence in my life all the time. Just to be able to talk to Him

and tell Him about the joys and fears in my life, and to hear the soft whisper of His voice, when He assures me: "Don't worry My child, I am with you - I will hold your hand tight."

You never have to feel alone or lonely, because in Matt. 28 Jesus gave us the assurance, the promise: "Remember, I am with you all the days, unto the end of the world." So He is here with me now, where I sit and work or where I live alone in an old age home. So I never have to be lonely again. Jesus is beside me at all times. And I can even talk to Him!

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you very much that I can know today that there will never be an end to Your presence with me - that You are always with me, until the end of time.

Trust

Ruth 3:1-4

Naomi wants bursts with excitement as she clearly sees how her plan to get Ruth and Boaz together starts to work. The pieces of the puzzle are interlocking one by one. But she also very thoroughly realizes that the battle is still very far from won. She dearly wishes to have descendants of her own. She envies the other grandmothers with grandchildren dancing around them. How she yearns for the cheerful voices of children! That Ruth is a Moabite girl, and that she is just Naomi's "ex"

daughter-in-law, has not mattered for a long time. This dear girl has crept into her heart very deeply. She is now her own, own daughter!

But Naomi is not just about a descendant, she will also do everything in her power to ensure that Ruth is well taken care of and that she gets a good husband. And who's better now in all of Israel than precisely Boaz! Now she will have to do her planning very carefully, to the finest details to make the plan work.

Naomi sighs heavily - harvest time is something of the past! In addition, these encounters

between Ruth and Boaz are also something of the past. But Naomi has a trump card. She has one last chance, and she better not let it pass. It's threshing time! The harvest is picked up from the fields, which means that the barley must now be processed on the threshing floor to get the grain from the veins. Now she knows Boaz will certainly not sit at home idly while his labourers do the threshing! Boaz was going to be there with them on the threshing floor, and he was going to work with his workers to clear the grain. It's hard work, and the men don't even come home at night, they just sleep on the threshing floor.

Now Naomi thinks that this is the ideal opportunity for Ruth to "catch" Boaz. Naomi laughs at her own thought, because it certainly sounds very drastic, but that's exactly what it is! Ruth has to literally catch him! But how?

All night, Naomi lies wrestling with her thoughts. Just say now something goes wrong. Ruth's good reputation, which she has built up over the past few years, is at stake. She has already crept deep into everyone's hearts, and all the women speak only with great praise of Ruth, despite her being a Moabite. If something goes wrong, her good reputation

is at stake and all her hard work is purely for nothing. She will be accused of being a slut!

"Lord, God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and also God of Rahab the prostitute, please give me wisdom to work out a plan," she prays, with tears running down her cheeks. "You saved Rahab when Jericho's walls fell, and you made her one of our people. Nothing is impossible for You! Please watch over Ruth! And grant that Boaz will make the right decision." And so as an afterthought she prays: "Lord, I leave everything in Your capable hands. My confidence is in You

alone!” Suddenly Naomi knows exactly what to do.

When the first cock crows, Naomi wakes her daughter-in-law up. Ruth immediately sees that Naomi has a very important thing on her mind this morning. “Ruth, you have to listen very carefully to what I want to tell you. It is vital!”

Ruth's heart beats in her throat. Something terrible must be wrong if Naomi is so serious so early in the morning. "Mom?"

But she didn't even get to ask her question. "You have to carry out my assignment to the finest detail, because if things go wrong, then all our chances are

gone," Naomi steamrollers ahead. Ruth has a big question mark on her face - here comes serious business! Her stomach is tied in a knot. "Ruth, I told you that Boaz is family and that he is one of our redeemers. Today they are going to thresh his grain, and of course Boaz will also be on the threshing floor. Today you have to go and settle the matter! Today is the day you're going to make sure Boaz wants you as his wife!"

Often situations come up in your life, for which you have no advice. Your first reaction is to stress about it. Concern sits in your stomach until you feel as if you

are developing a stomach ulcer. Then you start making all kinds of plans, but whatever way you plan, it only gets worse and worse! Oh yeah, I've been in situations like this, and believe me: it's really hard!

The answer is simple. Calm down and put your full trust in the Lord alone. Then pray and tell Him what your worries and anxieties are. Then tell Him that you believe that He is in complete control and that you accept the situation in which you are in. Also tell Him that you fully trust Him to walk with you every step of the way through this situation and

hold your hand. Then ask Him to open your ears of faith so that you will recognize His voice when He commands you, and He will give you the wisdom and courage to do His command. Then just be patient!

Prayer:

Lord, I am often so impatient, and I want to do things my own way. Please give me full confidence in You alone, and patience to wait on You.

Difficult Assignment

Ruth 3:1-5

Ruth gets such a tight feeling on her stomach when Naomi wakes her up very early one morning. Naomi has already told her that Boaz is family and that he is their redeemer. Now Ruth wonders why Naomi wakes her up to remind her on an empty stomach. But she immediately sees that her mother-in-law is on a serious mission today.

"Boaz and his workers are going to thresh barley on the threshing floor today. Tonight is your chance to make sure he has to marry you!"

Ruth's heart was beating in her throat, it was much worse than she thought. "I can't do it!" She wants to tell Naomi, but the words can't even come out her mouth. "I hardly know the man, and I am a Moabite! And on top of that, the friendship he has shown me - he is so friendly with everyone"

"Ruth, go wash yourself and make yourself beautiful. And put on your most beautiful clothes. And then you go to the threshing floor." Ruth still wants to protest, but Naomi has already decided, and Ruth can see that this mother-in-law of hers is very adamant today. Nothing and no

one is going to change her mind.

“Mom, what exactly should I do at the threshing floor? And what do I tell Boaz when I get there? After all, it's a place for the men to work, and they certainly wouldn't want a woman out there in their way?”

But Naomi has other plans. “Ruth, you won't say anything to Boaz. You have to make him do the work!”

Ruth is shaking with anxiety. She's not happy about this. But she sees that she certainly cannot make Naomi change her mind.

“Ruth, when you get to the threshing floor this afternoon, make sure Boaz doesn't see you, because then all the plans are going to fail. You have to watch him, and when they stop working for dinner, you have to stand ready.”

"Should I sit down and chat with him, Mom?"

“No, definitely not! Wait, let me explain. Everyone is going to be tired of the day's hard work, and I think they're going to turn in early. So when they have finished eating and drinking wine and are merry, he will surely find a place to lie down. And then you have to

strike!”

Now Ruth is really worried, this thing is starting to give her nightmares! “Mom, how do you mean I have to strike? What exactly should I do? I'm not going to seduce him, Mom? Mom can't expect that! ”

“No, it's not quite that bad,” Naomi laughs at her daughter-in-law's discomfort. “You just crawl into his feet unnoticed and then you lie there. That's it! You don't have to do anything further.”

Ruth's mouth falls open, her eyes stretched like two saucers. Her mouth is cork-dry. “Do I have to do this?” She wants to ask, but

she doesn't make a sound. Ruth heard all the gossip about the things that could happen on a threshing floor. "Just say people think that Boaz and I" She closes her eyes. She doesn't even want to think about the consequences.

Then she pulls herself together. She looks determinedly at her mother-in-law: "I'll do it Mom!"

But at the same time, she also decides that this evening with Boaz will go no further than just lying at his feet and carrying out her mother-in-law's instructions. She wants to live a clean life and she does not want to tempt

anyone else, especially dear Boaz.

Sometimes it takes great sacrifices from us to do what the Lord asks of us. Our reputation may even be at stake!

One pastor told me one day that as part of their training, they had to visit brothels in Durban to preach the gospel there. It was a very uncomfortable situation for him to talk to the women of the night under suspicious circumstances.

However, Jesus set the example by jeopardizing his own reputation by talking to a Samaritan woman, eating with the

scum of the earth, and even doing the totally unacceptable by touching lepers.

Jesus never promised His disciples that it would be easy to follow Him. On the contrary, He warned that sometimes it would ask big sacrifices from them and their hands would get dirty in the process.

Today He also asks of you and me that we should be prepared to get our hands dirty. That we will sometimes have to sit next to a very horrible character to talk about Jesus. That I sometimes have to do things that are terribly uncomfortable, for the Kingdom of

God.

The question is: Are you and I prepared to make those sacrifices?

Prayer:

Lord, please make me willing to do what You ask of me, even though it sometimes seems too much to me.

At the Threshing Floor

Ruth 3:6-9

Ruth's legs tremble as she leaves the house on her way to the threshing floor. A lovely scent of perfume hangs around her, something very precious that Naomi discovered. She is wearing her very best clothes and she feels very feminine. But fear envelops her heart. She doesn't know what to expect. "Lord, God of Abraham and of Naomi," she prays as she walks trembling the long distance to Boaz's threshing floor, "today I need You so much. Please protect me so that something will not happen later

that I will regret."

Boaz's threshing floor is a few hours walk away, and this morning the road feels extra long for Ruth. Cluttered thoughts bubble through her mind. "Am I ever doing the right thing? But that's for Naomi. Dear Naomi! How much did that woman not sacrifice for me? No, I just have to persevere with this!" She finally makes her decision, and walks faster.

When Ruth nears the threshing floor, she sees the giant mountain of sheaves, and she sees how hard the men are working. She wants to walk closer, but then she

restrains herself. She doesn't dare betray her presence, because then she will spoil everything. Boaz may not know she's here! Her eyes search for Boaz, and then she sees him as he struggles with the workers to separate the grain from the chaff and stalks. Hard work! "Here they are going to work until late tonight!" Ruth sums up the situation, and then sighs heavily.

The day creeps by slowly. But with interest she sees how the sheaves are getting smaller and the haystack was getting bigger and bigger. When it's dark, Boaz decides to call it a day. "Men,

tomorrow is another day, then we can finish. We sleep here on the threshing floor tonight, then we can start early at dawn again.”

Boaz made sure that there is enough to eat for all the workers, because you can't work on an empty stomach. And without a bag of wine or whatever, it can get cold here in the field. Ruth's patience is tested to the extreme as she sits and watches the men in the dark, singing merrily around a fire. "When are they going to sleep?" She wonders with a heavy sigh.

And then the men fall over one by one. Ruth's heart beats in her

throat as she sees Boaz making himself a bed of straw and crawling under the blankets. "The moment of truth has arrived!" She thinks shakily. She wants to turn around and flee into the night, but then she sees Naomi's face in front of her again. She waits until Boaz is deep in sleep, then she sneaks carefully closer. Actually, she could have stepped loudly too, the men were sleeping deeply from the wine.

With a beating heart, Ruth carefully lifts the blankets off Boaz's feet, and then she crawls to his feet under the blanket. There is no question of sleep.

"What will happen when Boaz wakes up and finds me here?" Her heart beats in her throat from anxiety. She wants to get cold feet and run away, but now it's too late. Here she will simply just have to stay put until something happened.

And then it happens: Suddenly Ruth feels a movement when Boaz turns over. He feels the warmth at his feet, and then Boaz is wide awake! His heart beats in his throat. Who would want to come and lie with me now? The audacity!" He tries to figure out who is at his feet, but all he can see in the moonlight is that it is a

woman. "Who are you?" He asks annoyed. "What are you doing here?"

Ruth is very close to tears when she replies with a voice that wants to break, "It's me, Ruth, Naomi's daughter." And then she can't hold it anymore, and the tears flow freely. And so between the sobs, she begs him: "I depend on you - you are my redeemer. Please take me under your protection!"

Now Boaz sits upright. Suddenly he pities the poor girl. He silences her so that the other men do not wake up, because then it can certainly end in a scandal, and

that's the last thing Boaz wants. He doesn't worry about himself, but this girl's reputation is at stake. He admires her courage. But what should he do now?

"Don't worry girl," he whispers to Ruth, "I'll do what you ask."

Boaz realizes with a shock that Ruth will have to disappear before the men wake up. But she can't walk back to Bethlehem in the pitch dark. Ruth will have to sleep at my feet for the night. But at dawn she better be gone!

Often we read the Old Testament with eye patches. We experience the Lord as a God of war. But isn't this the most romantic story

you've ever read? And it comes from the heart of the Old Testament. He is a God of love, and here we see again just how wonderful His love is, and has been all these years. Today, His love for you and me is still just as wonderful. Look past all sin and wickedness and hardship, and you see God's love stand out above all.

Prayer:

Thank you Lord, for this beautiful story of love, and thank you above all for Your love for me.

A Night Next to a Haystack

Ruth 3:10-18

No sleep for Boaz. When he discovers Ruth here at his feet, it scares all the sleep out of him. A cluttered mind grinds his mind, what must he do? He loves this girl very much, she definitely lets his heart beat faster. But there are simply too many obstacles in the way. Boaz hears Ruth's calm breathing. He feels the warmth of her body at his feet. "Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, please give me wisdom to deal with this delicate matter, and please keep me from doing wrong things." He prays very earnestly.

“How can I ever tackle such a difficult matter without You? How can I tackle anything without You?” Boaz confesses on the threshing floor that his only trust has always been in God.

Boaz feels he could bite his tongue over the clumsy way he said things when he discovered Ruth: "May the Lord bless you my daughter." Yes, and then he told Ruth that she could run after a young man, or maybe find someone rich. But what she does to him is even better than the wonderful love she shows Naomi. "I could have made it so much more romantic!" He thinks. And on

top of that, the promise that he will act as her redeemer.

But then Boaz's belly makes a knob - there is another contender for Ruth, one who is closer to family. What if he decides to exercise his right and take Ruth? "No, it won't be good!" Boaz says out loud, and then he is startled his own words. "I'll have to make a plan! Ruth has crept deep into my heart, I don't want to lose her. There must be a way!"

Somewhere a rooster crows, and then Boaz realizes that the day will soon break. Ruth just has to get out of here before anyone sees her! He gently shakes her

awake. "Come here," he tells her, "give me your shawl." Boaz ties the shawl into a bag, and he fills it full of barley. Then he helps Ruth load it onto her back. She quietly sneaks away from the threshing floor so that she does not wake anyone.

But Boaz is in a hurry too, he doesn't want to waste any more time. He still has to get the wheel rolling immediately! When the men wake up one by one at dawn, they discover to their surprise that Boaz is already gone, back to Bethlehem. Today they will have to thirst without him. "Why would he have left so

early?" They wonder.

In Bethlehem, Naomi walks up and down impatiently. She did not shut an eye all night. She prayed for her daughter-in-law all night long. When she sees someone running in the distance, she knows it's Ruth. She runs to meet her daughter-in-law. Naomi can burst with curiosity: "Tell! Tell!" She urges Ruth, even before the poor Ruth can catch her breath. "What happened? Come on, tell me!"

Naomi doesn't even notice the giant bag of barley that Ruth is carrying so heavily. At home she throws down the bag, relieved:

"From Boaz, Mom, he says I may not come here empty-handed to my mother-in-law."

Then, even before Ruth tells her what happened, Naomi knows and tears of gratitude flows down her cheeks. "Thank you Lord!" She murmurs.

When they come to rest, Ruth tells her the whole story, down to the finest detail. Naomi drinks every word, like a thirsty sponge. Open-mouthed she listens when Ruth tells her how she had to hide there so no one saw her. "It was so exciting!" beams Ruth, "but by late afternoon I was so tensed up already. As the sun

went down, and I smelled the delicious food Boaz gave his men, my stomach cried out from hunger, but I had to hold on. I was so tired of all the stress. But I realized that if I gave up now, it would be all for nothing.”

She tells Naomi how terribly scared she was when she entered the camp, and how wildly her heart beat as she crawled into Boaz's feet. “I just prayed the whole time, and that's all that carried me through it. And Boaz - I felt safe with him! He never tried to exploit the situation. He is such a dear man!” Ruth bursts into tears from sheer relief that it was

all over.

“Ruth, I prayed for you every moment of the night.” consoles Naomi, “and the Lord was faithful, He kept you. But wait, you will see, things are going to happen quickly. Boaz is definitely not going to rest until the case is finalized today!”

We always expect the worst when such a difficult situation arises - people just surrender to their cravings. Both Ruth and Boaz have proven that you can restrain yourself. Humanly speaking, this is not possible, but with the power that the Lord gives you, it is possible, and you can keep your

life clean even in the most difficult circumstances.

Prayer:

Lord, please guard me every moment of the day, especially when the devil is cunning with temptations to try to seduce me.

Transaction at the City Gate

Ruth 4:1-12

After spending the night on the threshing floor, Boaz left in a hurry, following Ruth to Bethlehem. He doesn't want to waste time! He has already heard the alarming news that the other redeemer intends to exercise his right to act as a redeemer for Naomi, and he must prevent this at all costs. Arriving in Bethlehem, Boaz talks to some of his friends, all respected men. "Meet me at the city gate!" He commands them.

"What would Boaz be planning?" the men wonder, "It must be a

very serious matter if he wants to call us together so urgently!"

Bethlehem's city gate is a hive of activity. This is the place where all the major trade deals take place. There is plenty of room for meetings, and this is also where most major decisions are made. There are always a crowd of people at the city gate, because it is the only place to where people can move to their fields outside the city. And precisely for that reason Boaz decides to execute his plan here at the city gate. Here he will meet Ruth's prospective redeemer and enter into an agreement with him. He

will see to it that there are enough witnesses to make the case legal, and that the young man will not be able to turn around later and declare the agreement null and void.

Up to this point, it was the women who had taken all the initiative in the matter. But now they can relax. After all, they had achieved what they wanted, and now it is a matter for Boaz and the men.

Boaz sat down in the city gate. He knows that the other redeemer must pass through here to his fields at any moment, and then he will confront him. The other men are also arriving one

by one. "What's going on with Boaz? It must be a very important matter!" But Boaz does not say a word about his intentions.

And then the other young man arrives. Boaz's heart beats in his throat: "Lord, please give me the wisdom to handle the matter properly!" He prays earnestly.

"Shalom!" Boaz greets him friendly and signals to him that he wants to talk to him seriously. "Come and sit here."

Now the other men are sitting upright. "What's going on here?" It's buzzing like a swarm of bees between them.

“You are probably aware that Naomi is selling the piece of land that belonged to her late husband, Elimelech. Of course, you have the first claim, because you are her closest family. I called the men together so you can finish the transaction here and buy the land.”

The man smiles broadly, such luck doesn't come to a man everyday.

“You know, of course, that responsibility comes with the deal? You will have to act as a redeemer. Are you willing to do that?”

“Yes, of course!” He replies. “Of

course I am willing to be her redeemer."

But the following words from Boaz give him second thoughts: "Oh, of course there is a nice bonus that goes with this: when you buy the land from Naomi, you get that Moabite girl, Ruth as a woman with it. The land must remain in the family, as you are certainly aware of."

The man is definitely not happy with this. That means his property could be in danger, all because of a Moabite girl. No, he certainly cannot take this risk. And on top of that, he may be sitting with a woman he doesn't even want! His

face is pale when he blasts out: "I don't think I can act as a redeemer. I'd rather not enter into this deal." And with that he took off his shoe and gave it to Boaz. "Here! Take my shoe. This is the receipt of our transaction! I'm out! The land is yours, if you want to buy it! I can't stand a Moabite!"

Boaz smiles contentedly: "Thank you, thank you Lord!" he rejoices in his heart. It buzzes between the men when Boaz announces: "You are all witnesses to this transaction. I buy the land from Naomi and I also accept the responsibility to act as a redeemer. Along with that, I take

Ruth, the widow of Maglon as my wife. The land of the deceased will remain in his family and his memory will never be forgotten."

This is definitely not the end of the story, this is just the beginning. When the men congratulate him and bless him, Boaz doesn't even have the faintest idea of what it all really means. In his strongest expectations, could Boaz have dreamed that from this marriage the greatest king in the history of Israel, David, would be born. But even more, that just another link has been created in the ancestry of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Prayer:

Lord, I am just stunned every day when I see how You provide and plan. Yes Lord, then I realize that I am also part of Your wonderful plan of counsel. Help me to carry out what You are planning for me.

Marriage from Heaven

Ruth 4:13-22

Boaz married Ruth. In short, the author of the story of Ruth gives only the most important facts. But don't think it happened so simply. After the stressful night on the threshing floor and the negotiations in the city gate, all the tension was suddenly over. The news spread like wildfire, and long before Boaz could reach Ruth to ask her for her answer, she and the whole of Bethlehem already knew that they were going to get married!

Ruth and Naomi were waiting in anticipation to hear the outcome

of the negotiations, but Boaz was still receiving the blessings of his friends when one of the women came running to the two: “Boaz says he is going to marry you Ruth!”

Ruth and Naomi grabbed each other around their necks and cried with joy. “Thank you God, God who provides, You have taken care of us once again. You provided when everything seemed impossible. Thank God, thank you!” Naomi is overwhelmed with joy, laughing and crying, all together. The joy is very, very great.

When Boaz finally arrives to tell

Ruth the news, he is disappointed to learn that she has already known for quite some time. "Women!" he muttered, and then he laughed, because what else could he have expected?

The whole of Bethlehem is in turmoil - Boaz and the beautiful Moabite girl, Ruth are getting married. For a full week, celebrations and weddings are held. Boaz is a wealthy man, and he can afford to throw big celebrations.

Nine months were barely over, when it was time for Ruth and Boaz's firstborn to arrive. The author of the Ruth story states it

plainly and unequivocally: "The Lord made Ruth pregnant." Such things do not just happen! The hand of God is clearly recognized in this. And again, the whole of Bethlehem is obviously in turmoil. Now, the men do not pay much attention to babies and infants, but among the women it buzzes properly. "Is this going to be a boy?" Like a swarm of bees, they gather around the house.

And then comes the most beautiful sound that man has ever heard - a baby screaming. "It's a boy!" the midwife shouts excitedly at the bystanders. "It's a healthy boy! Praise the great Name of the

Lord!"

"All praise to the Lord," one of the women says to Naomi, who wants to burst with pride, "because He has given you a redeemer today."

"Yes," another woman agrees, "may the name of the redeemer be known in Israel."

"And may he bring you joy and take care of you in your old age!" Another adds her voice as she performs a few merry dance steps.

"Naomi, that daughter-in-law of yours may be a Moabite, but to you she is worth more than seven sons. We can all see how much

she loves you.” Naomi is very concerned about all this attention!

While Ruth is resting after childbirth, the midwife brings the small bundle of joy to Naomi, in the sight of broody women "Oooing" and "Aaaahing." Tears of joy flow down her cheeks as she takes the fragile baby on her lap. "Today I adopt you as my own child!" The women heard her say.

“Obed, so you should name him Naomi, Obed. A boy was born to Naomi.” The neighbours’ wives had spoken, and Naomi was pleased.

And so the story of Ruth and

Naomi comes to an end. But between the beginning and end of this short story, there are many things locked up. We saw how Naomi and Ruth didn't sit still when the trials hit them. We saw how creative they went about it and went to great lengths to settle the matter. We saw that they were even willing to take big risks. And when Boaz comes into the picture, he acts just as creatively.

But in between, we see that it is actually God who gives the solutions and eventually the descendants. Throughout the story we see the hand of God in it.

But Ruth's story doesn't end here at all. In the postscript we see a short genealogical tree. Little Obed became the father of Jesse years later. Jesse's son, David, becomes the greatest king Israel ever had. But more importantly: 1200 years later, in the same town where little Obed was born, Bethlehem, another Baby is born. He is of the descendants of David - Jesus the Messiah! A Moabite girl from a pagan country, who is not part of God's people and once rejected by the inhabitants, is included in the lineage of Jesus. So Ruth's story is truly Marriage from Heaven!

Today, the wonder is that you and I can also be part of Jesus' family. Everything, everything is grace!

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for this wonderful story of Ruth and Naomi and of Your great grace.